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SIMPLE GUIDES TO CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

Edited by

FLORENCE ROBINSON,

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Simple Guides to Christian Knowledge

EDITED BY FLORENCE ROBINSON
FORMERLY OF ST HILDA'S HALL, OXFORD

THE WORK OF THE PROPHETS

ISAIAH

THE WORK OF
THE PROPHETS

BY

ROSE E. SELFE

AUTHOR OF "HOW DANTE CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN," "WITH DANTE IN PARADISE," ETC.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS AND TWO MAPS.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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CHAPTER I

THE PROPHETS BEFORE AMOS

In this little book we are going to read about the work of the Prophets, and the first questions we must ask are, Who and what were the prophets? When did they live? Above all, why did they live?

As we open the book, and look at the pictures of the sad and earnest-looking men, our curiosity is awakened by their unusual dress and attitudes. It is to answer our questions, and to point out where fuller answers can be found, that this book has been written. The writings of the prophets form a large part of the Old Testament Scriptures, which were well known and loved by our Lord and His disciples, as they have been loved by the whole Christian Church to this day. We read in

the New Testament of "the law and the prophets," and of "Moses and the prophets." We confess in the Creed our belief "in the Holy Ghost who spake by the prophets." How much do we know about them really?

Some of the names of these prophets are familiar to us all. Chapters from the books which bear their names are read in our churches, among the Old Testament lessons. Isaiah, for instance, recalls to most of us the lesson for Good Friday, or for Christmas Day, and the Epiphany. The stories of Daniel and of Jonah have been familiar to us since we were little children. But these are only three of the prophets. There are sixteen who give their names to books in the Bible, and perhaps there are not many of us who could name them all without difficulty, still less be able to say something about each one. Who was Habakkuk, for instance, or Nahum, or Zephaniah? What was the message of each to the people of Israel? Yet the words of these men, of whom we know so little, who lived and suffered and spoke for God long centuries

ago, may speak to our hearts now, as truly as they did to the hearts of those who first heard them. Sixteen prophets, to whom the Word of the Lord came! It will be worth while taking a little trouble to learn something about each one. If we study their teaching carefully, we shall find that it will inspire us to think wisely and act nobly.

There were many prophets in Israel before the sixteen who wrote down their teaching in the books which we possess in the Bible, and these earlier prophets were also sent by God with a direct message to the people of Israel. What, then, is the meaning of the name prophet? What distinguishes him from all other men?

Our English word prophet is taken from a Greek word, and means one who speaks for God, who tells God's people what His will for them is. The Hebrew prophets lived in closer communion with God than other men did. They were inspired directly by Him, and thus they came to look at the events of life as He would have us look at them. This special insight into

the truth and meaning of things prepared them to be the channels through which God revealed to men His will and purposes. It is a common mistake to think that a prophet is merely a foreteller—one who tells beforehand what is going to happen in the future. God's prophets very often did foretell future events ; but this is only natural, because being taught by God to understand the meaning of the present, they were also more likely to know what the future would bring forth.

It was because they knew that God was speaking through them, that they were courageous enough to deliver their message, even when that message displeased the kings and others who heard it, and brought the speakers into danger.

It is not until we come down to the time of *Samuel*, that we begin the real succession of prophets, who prepared the way for the writing prophets. You have read about Samuel, and will remember that he was the chief person in Israel when the people asked for a king. He was not called a prophet by the people of his own

time, but was called the Seer, or the Man of God. The name *seer* was given to him because he could see far into the true meaning of things. He lived closer to God than other men did, so that he knew things which were hidden from them. When Saul's father lost his asses, Saul went to the seer to ask him where they could be found. We know that from a child Samuel had learnt to listen to God's voice, and to give His messages to others. There is one incident in the lives of Saul and Samuel which shews how truly Samuel was of the same spirit as the writing prophets (1 Sam. xv. 1–22). On one occasion Saul was bidden to go out against the Amalekites, and fight against them, and destroy them and all their flocks and herds. Saul obeyed part of this command, but spared the king of the Amalekites, and all the best of the sheep and oxen. When Samuel reproved Saul for his disobedience, he answered that he had kept the best of the animals to sacrifice to God. Then Samuel uttered these impressive words: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the

voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." When we come to study the books of the prophets, we shall find the lesson contained in Samuel's words repeated again and again. The prophets taught men to know God's will, and to act in accordance with it. They tried to make them understand that religious observances are of no value *in themselves*, apart from a willing and obedient life.

Samuel the Seer left no writings behind him, but the record of his life and of all his dealings with Saul and David is full of interest. From his time onwards we hear a great deal about prophets generally, and the stories of some of them run side by side with those of the Kings of Israel. It is in Samuel's lifetime that we first read of "the schools of the prophets." It has been thought possible that Samuel himself founded these schools, of which we read a good deal during the reign of Saul, and of some of his successors. But although this is not certain, we find that Samuel had a great deal to do with these schools,

and helped and encouraged them very much. They were not schools in our ordinary use of the word, but were perhaps what we now call guilds. The members were young men who wished to devote their lives to God's service in a special way. They lived under the same roof, were interested in the same objects, and worked for the same end. They all helped forward, according as they were able, the knowledge and remembrance of God, and did what they could to keep alive in the hearts of the people the great truths of their religion. God had brought the nation out of the bondage of Egypt to live in the land of Canaan, under His special guidance and control, and all through their history He sent them messengers to remind them of His love and purpose for them. Many of these prophets are not known to us by name. But others we have read of in connection with David and the other kings. *Nathan*, you will remember, came to David with a message from God to reprove him for his great sin ; and *Gad* was also sent to him after the numbering of the people, to tell him that his act had been

displeasing to God. These two did not belong to the schools of the prophets, but had special messages to give to the king. From the beginning of the history of the kings, from Saul onwards, we find that the prophets were sent to them to rebuke them for their sins, and to remind them of the righteous God whose laws they were bound to obey.

There is one story about the prophets which is not quite easy to understand. It shews us that not all prophets were equally taught by God, and that some gave wrong advice to the kings. In the time of King Ahab, of whom we shall hear more when we come to the story of Elijah, there were four hundred prophets of the Lord. Before going out on an expedition against the Syrians, Ahab asked these prophets whether he would be successful in the battle. They all said that he would, and encouraged him to go out. But there was another prophet, called *Micaiah*, and Ahab asked his advice also. Now Micaiah must have been one of those who listened for God's voice with diligence and devotion, and was not afraid to

speak the truth, even though it might make the king angry. And he told Ahab bravely that his army would be defeated, and he himself slain. This was a true message, and what Micaiah said came to pass.

We cannot be quite sure whether God allowed the prophets to be deceived, in order that His purpose concerning Ahab might be fulfilled. But, in any case, we are sure that not all who belonged to the order of prophets lived equally near to God, and knew as much of His will and ways, as the few great prophets whose names and lives are known to us. Some may have joined themselves to the prophets in order to get a living, and not because they felt they had a true commission from God.

We must say a few words in this introductory chapter about two more prophets whose stories we all know well—Elijah and Elisha. *Elijah* suddenly appears in the Bible history, standing brave and strong before King Ahab, and predicting that there would be no rain for years to come. This does not seem to be like a prophet's usual message,

but probably God sent Elijah with this prediction beforehand, in order that when the drought came Ahab might believe that Elijah had really been taught by God what was going to happen.

Elijah's special work was to remind Ahab and his people of the true and righteous God, who was watching over Israel. Ahab had married a heathen princess called Jezebel, whose people worshipped a false god, Baal, and there was real danger lest the Israelites should be led away from their true faith to this idolatrous worship. There were many prophets of Baal in the land, and Elijah invited them to meet him on Mount Carmel, and to offer a sacrifice to Baal, while he would offer one to the true God. This was done, and with the result which Elijah expected. Though they slew their sacrifice, and prayed and cried to their god for hours, "there was no voice, nor any that answered." Whereas, when Elijah slew his bullock, and prayed to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, God sent down fire, which consumed the sacrifice, and all the people had to acknowledge Him as the true God. Besides this

great triumph, Elijah was sent to carry God's message of anger against Ahab for the cruel murder of Naboth—a neighbour of his in humble life, whose vineyard the king had coveted. The later prophets repeat again and again God's indignation against such acts of cruelty and treachery towards the poor and defenceless. Eastern kings were apt to think nothing of robbing their subjects of property or life; but God's prophets shew us how much He cares for the rights of all men, and that those in high position and authority ought to be not only just but generous to those in a more lowly station. Elijah tells Ahab that because of this unrighteous act God will take the throne from him; and though, in consequence of Ahab's humbling himself in penitence, he is allowed to be king till the end of his life, his idolatrous wife comes to a cruel death, and his sons do not long possess the kingdom.

We have not time to dwell on the many beautiful stories told us of Elijah, but there is one incident which we must not pass over quite unnoticed. After his triumph on Mount Carmel,

Elijah had a time of great sadness and depression. He thought that his life and his eager devotion to the Lord of Hosts were all in vain; that the people would not own and serve their true God. And then the Lord gave him an experience which was like a parable in action. He was alone with God in a cave in Mount Horeb: "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire *a still small voice*" (1 Kings xix. 11, 12). After this, God spoke with Elijah and encouraged him. The lesson He wanted to impress upon His servant seems to be the same which came to the prophet Zechariah centuries later: "Not by might, nor by power, but by *My spirit*, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. iv. 6). Elijah was to learn that it is not only, or even chiefly, by manifestations of power, such as the fire on

Mount Carmel, that God works. The still, small voice of His Spirit speaks home to men's hearts, and wins their allegiance.

Elijah's life was not lived much in towns, or in the company of other people. He appeared suddenly when he was wanted, and disappeared again as suddenly into the wilderness, or among the rocks and caves of the mountains. He was known to "the sons of the prophets," but we do not read that he had very much to do with them. His end was as mysterious and unusual as his life had been. He was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind in sight of one faithful disciple only. That disciple was *Elisha*, whom God had bidden Elijah to anoint to be prophet in his place. Elisha had responded to the call, and had followed Elijah, and "ministered unto him." And now, when the greater prophet was gone, Elisha was to take up his work in Israel, and bear witness to God's governance of the people.

Elijah had left his mantle to Elisha, as an outward and visible sign that he was to inherit his spirit, and carry on his work. Many miracles

are recorded as being wrought by Elisha. He was a great deal with "the sons of the prophets," as their head and teacher, and he had much to do with the kings of Israel, and with the active life of the nation. Two of the most beautiful of the stories about Elisha are the raising of the Shunammite's son and the healing of Naaman, the Syrian captain, from his leprosy. When Elisha lay dying, after a long life spent in the service of God and His people, Joash the King of Israel came to his bedside, and mourned over him, calling him "my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." It was as if the protector of the kingdom, who represented the unseen Ruler of that as of all kingdoms, was to be taken away.

Among the later prophets, whose writings we are going to consider, we do not find many who lived so near to the life of the kings and nation as Elisha did. It often seems as if their message came from outside the ordinary life of the people—a solemn word of warning or encouragement, uttered by a prophet of whose

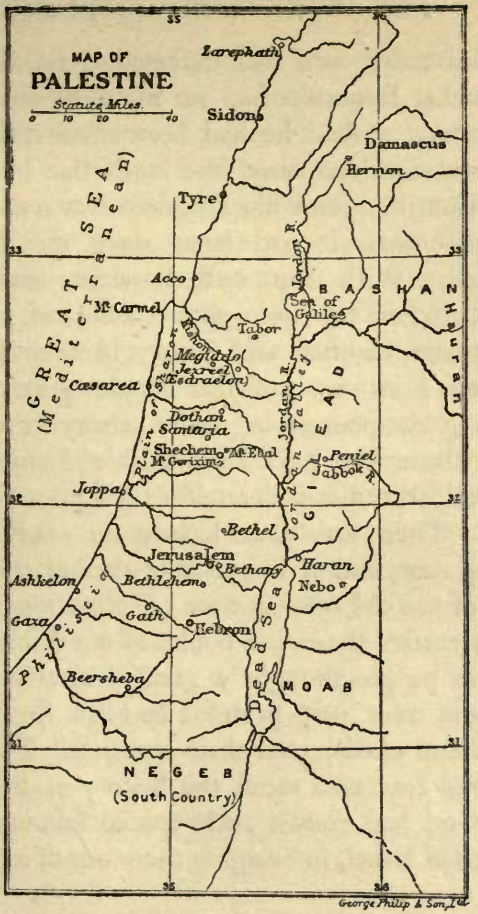
personal life we know little or nothing. But we must never forget how much the later prophets owed to those who had been before them, and had kept alive in the hearts of the people the knowledge of their unseen God. God was teaching the people gradually to understand that He was not one among many gods, but the one supreme Head and Ruler of the world. All that Samuel and Nathan, and the sons of the prophets, and Elijah and Elisha had taught, was God's preparation for Amos and his successors, who had deeper and wider truths to impart.

CHAPTER II

AMOS THE HERDSMAN

BETWEEN forty and fifty years had passed since the death of Elisha, the last of the older order of prophets, when Amos, the first of the new order, appears in Israel. A great deal had happened during that time. Joash, the king, had died, and his son, Jeroboam II., had been the most successful and prosperous king who had ruled over Israel since the division of the nation into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, after the death of Solomon.

When we study the history of the northern kingdom, from Rehoboam to Joash, we read of constant wars against the nations around, and especially against Syria. But by the time of Amos these wars were almost at an end. A great power had come from the east, the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Esdraelon
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Ebal
Peniel
Jabbok
GILEAD
Joppa
Bethel
Jerusalem
Bethany
Haran
Nebo
Ashkelon
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Assyrian army, and had defeated Syria so completely that Jeroboam had no more trouble from that quarter. And he had been successful in his wars, and had recovered the lands that had been taken from him, and his kingdom was now larger in extent than it had been since the days of Solomon. With the settled peace had come greater riches to the upper classes of society, and greater comfort and luxury in their homes. And alas! as some of the people grew richer, others grew poorer, as seems always the case, unless those who have the wealth and enjoyment are unselfish and considerate for their poorer neighbours. There was more leisure for reading and writing now, and it is probable that at this time many of the old records were collected together to form hereafter the earlier books of our Bible.

The people thought a great deal about their God, and were very grateful to Him for having given them victory over their enemies. They felt proud to read and recall the history of the past, when God had shewn such special favour to the children of Israel, in bringing them out of captivity,

and establishing them in the Promised Land. They were very constant in worship, and in offering sacrifices, and no doubt felt they were most religious, and that God was much pleased with them, so that their kingdom would go on prospering. But a great surprise was in store for them. They were to learn that much of their life and conduct was very displeasing to God, that their religious worship gave Him no satisfaction, and that there were severe punishments in store for them. Who was to bring this unexpected message of warning and judgment? From what we have already read you will not be surprised to learn that it was a prophet, and from what we are now going to read it seems as if his voice was uplifted almost as suddenly and unexpectedly as that of Elijah before Ahab.

We hear nothing of Amos in the Books of the Kings. All we know of him is from his own book, and this prophetic writing tells us much more about the state of things in Israel at this time, than we can find anywhere else.

The date is about 760 B.C., and takes us a

long way back in the history of the world. Rome was not yet founded, and the principal Greek states, Athens and Sparta, were only gradually forming their laws, and preparing the way for the great part they were to play during the next few centuries.

What was Amos, and how had his previous life prepared him to be the prophet of righteousness and of judgment to the people of Israel? He was not trained in any school of the prophets, and probably he had no idea during his earlier years that his life was to be different from that of any of his fellows. He was a countryman, who followed the flock and gathered sycomore fruit in the open air, among all the sights and sounds and occupations of the country. His book is full of references to farming and other country pursuits. He speaks of threshing and ploughing, of a cart full of sheaves, of gardens and vineyards, of fig trees and olive trees, of locusts devouring the grass of the latter growth, of corn being sifted in a sieve. He has watched the stars by night, and seen the "deep darkness" give way before the dawn.

He has lived at the edge of the desert, and knows the dangers that lions may be to the flocks and herds. He is familiar with the roar which proclaims that some creature has fallen a victim to the king of beasts. And as he followed the flock, "the Lord took him," and filled his mind with great thoughts, and shewed him that it was to be his mission to go and prophesy to the people of Israel.

Amos did not live in the northern kingdom, but at Tekoa, in the kingdom of Judah. But the greater part of his message was to Israel, to the people who were living in ease and luxury under their victorious monarch. Though Amos had lived and worked in the country as we have seen, he must have known about the life of towns too; probably his business may have taken him to different places in the land. He certainly tells us about winter houses and summer houses, houses of ivory and of hewn stone; of people reclining upon beds of ivory, of idle feasting and drinking, of music and song. These passages give us a picture of how those rich people passed their days,

who had plenty of money for their own enjoyments, and no thought or care for the poor and suffering.

He knows, too, how punctually and carefully the people attend to their religious duties, burnt offerings and meal offerings, solemn assemblies, and feasts with songs and viols. The great sanctuary at Bethel was the religious centre of the kingdom. Bethel, where Jacob had seen his vision of angels ascending and descending, had been a place for worship ever since the times of the Judges, when the Ark was kept there. Now, under Jeroboam II., it was the scene of many feasts and sacrifices, and the Israelites seem to have assembled there in the same way as the Judæans went up to the Temple at Jerusalem. But the worship at Bethel was not pure or free from idolatry. The Lord was adored there under the form of a golden calf.

When the call of God came to Amos to go and prophesy to His people Israel, the herdsman could not resist that voice; and it was natural that he should go straight to Bethel,

where he knew that he should find people gathered together, and priests ministering in the sanctuary, to whom he could address his message.

It must have been a strange interruption to the joy of the worshippers, to hear, breaking into their music and feasting, the solemn voice of this unknown countryman, who did not belong to the sons of the prophets, and was not even a native of Israel. What did he say at Bethel? One terrible prophecy we know must have alarmed his hearers: "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land" (vii. 11). But these words were probably only a small part of the addresses he gave at Bethel. No doubt most of the other prophecies of the book, which were written on rolls of parchment after his return from the sanctuary, had been first delivered there by word of mouth. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, was so much disturbed by the words of Amos, and by the effect that they had upon those who heard them, that he sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, an

alarming message. He told the king that "Amos had conspired against him, in the midst of the land of Israel, and that the land was not able to bear all his words" (vii. 10). We are not told if Jeroboam took any notice of this message. Possibly he did not think the humble prophet likely to do any serious harm.

Amaziah himself urged Amos to go back to Judæa, and earn his living by prophesying there in his own country. He charged him to prophesy no more at Bethel, "for it is the king's sanctuary, and a royal house." Amos solemnly assured him that it was God's message which he had delivered, and that the future would shew the truth; and he added that Amaziah and his family would have much sorrow and suffering because he had tried to silence the voice of God speaking through His prophet (vii. 12–17).

After this Amos does not seem to have prophesied any more at Bethel, but he wrote his prophecies in the book which has come down to us as the first written prophecy.

The beginnings of things have often a special

meaning and interest for us. The first great ruler in a country, for instance, like our own King Alfred, leaves his mark on all the history that follows. The first great national poet, like Chaucer in England, or Dante in Italy, influences the writers of after times. It seems as if a door were opened into new thoughts and new ways of looking at life. And this is specially the case with the written prophecy of the Hebrews. The great lessons which "the Holy Ghost spake by" Amos contain fresh truth about God, about what religion is, and what our lives are meant to be. Many of these truths were quite new to those who first heard them. They are not, of course, new to us, who are living two thousand six hundred and fifty years after Amos, but we can still go back to his words, and find in them fresh strength and inspiration. For truth is eternal, and the words of God never pass away.

If you open the book of Amos, and begin to read it for yourselves, you may find some of it rather difficult to understand. But there are simple passages in it too which it is worth while to learn by heart. As he is the first of the written

prophets, it will be well to set down quite clearly the chief lessons he can teach us. In that way, we shall have a key not only to this book, but to many of the later prophets.

The first and second chapters contain a number of stern rebukes against the different nations who lived near Israel and Judah. God's voice comes loud and indignant from Jerusalem, His own central city, against the Syrians, the Philistines, the Phœnicians, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, announcing punishment which must follow their wrong-doing. These prophecies must have seemed strange to the Israelites, who did not realize that their God took any heed of the heathen nations, except to destroy them before the face of His own people. This is the beginning of a lesson which it took them a long time to learn, that the Lord is the God of all nations, not of the Hebrews only. And why were these nations to be punished, when they had never been taught of God? Because they had been cruel and inhuman, had killed innocent women, and insulted dead bodies. They had sinned against the natural

feelings of humanity, which, as Amos teaches us, God has implanted in the hearts of all men. Their barbarous cruelty had been the conduct of wild animals, and not of human beings.

But if the wrong-doings of the heathen had provoked God's wrath, how much more must punishment fall upon His own people? So Amos goes on to speak of the transgressions of Judah, and then more fully of Israel. You know how happily and easily the people of Israel had been living, quite unconscious of the righteous judgment which was hanging over them. And now Amos, inspired by God, pours forth a torrent of indignant words against their cruelty and selfishness to the poor, their irreverence in the house of their God, their forgetfulness of all that He had done for them (ii. 9, 10)—

> "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them,
> Whose height was like the height of the cedars,
> And he was strong as the oaks;
> Yet I destroyed his fruits from above,
> And his roots from beneath.
> And I brought you up out of the land of Egypt,
> And led you forty years in the wilderness,
> To possess the land of the Amorite."

And He had not left them without messengers, and examples of a self-controlled and temperate life (ii. 11)—

> "And I raised up of your sons for prophets,
> And of your young men for Nazirites."

But the people had silenced the prophets, and tempted the Nazirites to break their vows. They would not be reminded of their duty to God, but went on still in their wickedness.

Then God sent them different troubles and sorrows : famine and drought, the failure of their crops, pestilence, war. Amos goes through the whole list, and after describing each affliction, he repeats the same sad sentence (iv. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11)—

> "Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord."

Neither warning nor example nor suffering had awakened them to a sense of their sins. They had gone on hating those who had reproved them, and abhorring those that spoke uprightly. They had trampled upon the poor, and taken exactions of wheat ; they had taken bribes from those who were able to afford them, and given

unjust sentences against the needy who had no money with which to buy justice.

We seem to hear the voice of God through Amos growing more and more indignant, as the long list of charges against the sinful people goes on. And then, as if the thought of the suffering and injured poor comes in sharp contrast with the outward worship offered by the oppressors, He cries out (v. 21–23)—

"I hate, I despise your feasts,
And I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Yea, though ye offer Me your burnt offerings and meal offerings,
I will not accept them :
Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.
Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs;
For I will not hear the melody of thy viols."

So God's people have been mistaken all this time as to what He expects from them. He is a God of righteousness, and what He demands is justice and mercy. This is true religion, to obey God's laws, to listen to His voice in all the affairs of everyday life. Those who are His faithful servants will be faithful in prayer and worship also. But the outward ceremonial, accompanied

by the selfish, unjust life is only displeasing to God. Do you remember Samuel's words to Saul—

> "To obey is better than sacrifice,
> And to hearken than the fat of rams"?

Does the thought of these sins of the Israelites seem too far away from us to be of any interest? Are we inclined to feel that it is such a long-ago story that it has no meaning for us to-day? But the wonderful thing about the Bible stories is, that the same things which happened in Israel hundreds or thousands of years ago, are happening now in our own times, and what God taught the people then is just what He would have us learn now. He is the same, His years shall not fail.

Try to picture some of the scenes which Amos describes. Suppose a poor widow woman with an only son, to whom she looks for support, has him suddenly taken away from her and sold for a slave. She goes up in her distress to the gate of the city, the place where justice is administered in Eastern towns. She pleads for her son to be restored to her. She has no money to bribe the

judge with. The master of her son slips something into the judge's hand, and he "turns aside the needy from her right," and she goes back to poverty and loneliness. It is acts like these which move the Lord to anger.

Then, again, Amos says much against the self-indulgence of those who are well off—how they eat and drink, and rest and play, and sing, without a thought of those who have not enough to eat and drink, and who toil all day, and have no pleasures. This is a sinful waste of life in God's sight, and He would have us begin early to deny ourselves some of the things we like and enjoy, in order to be able to do something for those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

We must now turn to a passage in our prophet, which contains a very deep truth, both for the Israelites and for us all.

You know that the people prided themselves very much on having had a different history from that of any other nation. Ever since the call of Abraham, God had shewn special favour to the Hebrews, and had made them into a great nation

under His own guidance and protection. This was quite true, but in return for all His great goodness they had continually grieved Him by their wickedness. He had meant them to be "a peculiar people," not only in their fortunes, but in their goodness. Because "much had been given to them, of them much was required" (St. Luke xii. 48).

And because they had not remembered this, therefore their punishment was to be heavier. So Amos says, speaking for God (iii. 2)—

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* will I visit upon you all your iniquities."

"You only have I *known*." This does not mean that God had not created and controlled all the other nations of the earth, but to the Hebrews alone had He shewn Himself their intimate friend and guide, because of the great work that He had appointed them to do.

It is an old lesson to us, though new to Israel; the more privileges we have, the more is expected of us. The gifts and advantages bestowed upon us are no causes of pride, but great opportunities

for service. How ought the Israelites to have responded to God's special favour? This is what Amos now urges upon them—not to increase the number of their sacrifices and offerings, not to seek the different sanctuaries, at Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba, but (v. 6, 14, 15)—

"Seek the Lord, and ye shall live. . . .
Seek good, and not evil. . . .
Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate. . . ."

And then, as if the thought came over him of what it would mean if all the people turned from their evil ways, and set themselves to keep God's laws, he cries out with passionate earnestness (v. 24) —

"Let judgment roll down as waters,
And righteousness as an ever-flowing stream."

It is to these words of Amos that our minds go back again and again. Have you seen any great river flowing on with its resistless power, or sat beside a mountain waterfall watching the ceaseless rush of the water as if from an inexhaustible spring? These are parables of the stream of righteousness which Amos pictured

flowing through the land, fertilizing, refreshing, blessing all things. But, alas! most of those who heard or read the words paid no heed to them, and before forty years had passed the judgment had descended, and the Israelites were carried away as captives far from their own land, among the heathen Assyrians.

CHAPTER III

HOSEA THE SORROWFUL

WHAT lessons have we learned from the prophecies of Amos?

That God is the God of all nations; that much is expected from those to whom much has been given; that true religion means devotion to God, which leads us to obey His will, and is not content with outward worship only; that God is a God of righteousness, and that judgment must follow wilful wrong-doing.

It is very sad to think that the people to whom such messages were sent went on still in their wickedness. But so it was. A few years later than Amos, another prophet, named Hosea, was sent to the people of Israel, and from his book we find that the sins which had grieved God were

grieving Him still. The great stream of righteousness had not begun to flow through the land.

Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom. He did not come, like Amos, from Judah to rebuke the sinful people. And like all true patriots he felt with special keenness the wrong-doing of his fellow-countrymen. Some of his prophecies may have been written while Jeroboam II. was still king of Israel. Others were no doubt written later, when there were sore troubles in the land: one king murdering another and usurping the throne, and perhaps calling in the aid of Egypt or Assyria to keep him on his throne.

We do not know anything about Hosea's occupation in life, as we do about Amos. But we know a great deal about his personal life, which had much sorrow in it. It seems as if this sorrow was really what made him a prophet. God prepared him by love and suffering to be the prophet of love to His people.

Hosea had married a woman named Gomer, whom he loved very dearly. Three little children were born in their home, two boys and a girl.

And then a most sad thing happened. Gomer grew tired of her home and her husband, and went away from him and her children, to find a life of more excitement and pleasure. We can imagine what a terrible sorrow this was to Hosea, to be left alone by the wife whom he loved, and to whom he had given all he could to make her happy. The story of Gomer reminds us in some ways of the story of the Prodigal Son. She, like him, found that her life of pleasure did not make her really happy. She fell so low that she was sold as a slave. And then her husband, who had loved her all the time, went after her, and paid down fifteen pieces of silver, and brought her back again. Of course she could not expect to have the same place in her home as before, and be the honoured wife of the prophet. She had to live a secluded life, and learn to do without the pleasures which she had cared for so much. And then Hosea hoped that by-and-by she would be very sorry for all her disloyalty and selfish wrong-doing, and come back to her love for him, and for the rest of her days would live a godly, righteous, and sober life.

Do you wonder why Hosea had such a sorrowful history, so much harder to bear than losing his wife by death would have been? He tells us himself why God so afflicted him: out of his own love for his erring wife he learned the lesson of God's faithful love towards the people of Israel. Out of his own sorrow for her wrong-doing he learned God's sorrow for sin; and by what he felt was God's message to him, to take his wife from her slavery, and by stern yet loving discipline to try to win her back to love and goodness, he learned what was God's loving purpose for Israel.

This is the meaning of the book of Hosea. It is even more difficult to understand than the book of Amos. The prophet is so sad, and his mind is so filled with the thought of the wickedness of Israel, and their unfaithfulness to God, that the words follow one another too quickly to be at all simple or easy to grasp. This is one of the books which you will understand better when you have had more experience of life. But there are beautiful passages too, and we must quote

some of them, because they teach us so much of the "loving-kindness" of God.

Hosea writes quite as strongly about the wickedness of Israel as Amos does, and about the punishment that must fall upon them unless they repent. But there is much more about love and mercy and hope in this book, than in that of Amos.

In the second chapter God says—

"Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness,
And speak comfortably to her.
And I will give her her vineyards from thence,
And the valley of Achor for a door of hope :
And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth,
And as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

Part of their great wickedness was that they had departed from the pure worship of the only God, and had worshipped some of the Baals, the other gods of the land. Now God, speaking by Hosea, says—

"And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord,
That thou shall call Me Ishi (that is, my Husband) ;
And shalt call Me no more Baali (that is, my Lord).
And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever ;
Yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness,
And in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies.
I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness."

It is very beautiful to come upon such words as these, in the midst of all the severe indignation and rebukes with which so much of the book is filled. It is as if the prophet, inspired by God, saw sometimes, as light breaking through dark clouds, the hope of a penitent and purified Israel. God was revealing Himself as love as well as righteousness to these sinful, ungrateful people. Hosea knew, by his own experience, how we go on loving those who have grieved and deserted us. And if human love can be so patient and forbearing, how much more must God's love be? Yet the prophet was to "set the trumpet to his mouth," he was to be "as an eagle against the house of the Lord." The judgment must come, before the forgiveness and restoration were possible. How entirely they had forgotten what God had been to them in the past! (xi. 1, 3.)

> "When Israel was a child, then I loved him,
> And called My son out of Egypt. . . .
> I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms;
> But they knew not that I healed them."

Is not this a tender picture of a loving father,

gently guiding the tottering feet of the little one, and supporting him till he can go alone? Perhaps Hosea remembered how he had taught and led his own little children in the home that had been left so desolate. And then another image comes to his mind, of a kind and compassionate driver, at the end of a long journey, taking the yoke from his tired beasts, and feeding them before thinking of his own comfort.

> "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws,
> And I laid meat before them."

A kind and faithful husband, a tender patient father, a merciful drover—under all these figures does Hosea set the love of God to His people before us.

But this love does not shield them from punishment. Their idolatry, their selfishness, their cruelty, all the many sins by which they had destroyed themselves will meet with their just reward. The great Assyrian power will come down upon the land, Samaria, the capital city, will

be besieged, and the people will be carried away captive. Nothing can avert this judgment. Yet the book of Hosea ends with hope. God calls upon Israel to repent, to return to the Lord, with words of sorrow and penitence. And if this comes to pass, if the erring wife comes back to her loving husband, then these beautiful promises will be fulfilled (xiv. 4–7)—

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely :
For Mine anger is turned away from him.
I will be as the dew unto Israel :
He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon,
His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree,
And his smell as Lebanon.
They that dwell under his shadow shall return ;
They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine :
The scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. . . ."

And in the last verse of the book we read—

"The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them."

God is righteous, and requires His people to walk in His ways.

God is loving, and will receive in the arms of His mercy all who will return to Him.

Is it not wonderful that these great truths should have been revealed to the prophet seven hundred years before Christ came on earth, and gave us the parable of the Prodigal Son, and received the penitent thief on the Cross?

CHAPTER IV

ISAIAH THE STATESMAN

Amos and Hosea were the only two of the writing prophets whose message was addressed specially to the northern kingdom. In the year 725 B.C., Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, the great country to the east of Palestine, set siege to Samaria, the capital city of Israel. The siege lasted three years, and then the people had to give in. Most of them were carried away by their victorious enemies to exile in that far-off land, and never returned to their own country. We wonder if they ever thought of the words of Amos and Hosea, of which they took so little heed at the time. Perhaps some of them did, and realized that their exile was the due reward of their deeds. If so, they may have turned back to the true

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God in their hearts, and striven to serve Him more faithfully among their heathen conquerors, than they had in their own land. After their captivity we hear no more of them in the Bible, and we now turn all our attention to the land of Judah.

Here, in the southern kingdom, there had always been a king descended from David. About the time that Hosea was prophesying in Israel, a prophet received a call from God, to go to the people of Judah, with a message from Him.

This prophet was Isaiah, who gives his name to one of the longer books in our Bible. There are sixty-six chapters in this book, but the last twenty-seven were not written by Isaiah. Later on, we must consider the second part of the book. We know a good deal about Isaiah's own life, and this adds to the interest of reading his prophecies. He lived in Jerusalem, and was probably of high station. He was a statesman, as well as a prophet, and lived in intercourse with the successive kings of Judah, and was consulted by them as to their actions, and he did not hesitate to give them the

counsel with which he was inspired by God. It would be well for all rulers and governments to have such an adviser as the prophet Isaiah, and to listen to his words. The call of Isaiah is described to us in the sixth chapter of his book. In the year that a king of Judah, called Uzziah, or Azariah, had died, Isaiah was in the Temple at Jerusalem, perhaps musing upon the state of the nation, and the work that lay before the new king. It seemed to him that the roof and walls expanded, and he saw the true King (vi. 1–8)

"sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said—

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts:
The whole earth is full of His glory."

And it seemed to Isaiah that the foundations of the temple were moved "at the voice of Him that cried." At this great vision of the majesty of God, he was overcome by the sense of his own unworthiness, and of the sin of the people among

whom he dwelt. He cries out that he is a man of unclean lips.

"Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me."

Then the Lord gives him his solemn commission as a prophet to the people, and his life work begins.

Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. His call came to him before the captivity of the northern kingdom, but his words do not often refer to the Israelites, only to Judah and Jerusalem. When he speaks of "Israel," or the "house of Jacob," he is generally referring to all God's people as a whole.

Some of the lessons which Isaiah enforces had already been taught by Amos and Hosea. But every prophet has his own special message, and his way of delivering it is also God's gift. Isaiah saw very deeply into the meaning of all the events

that were passing around him, and some great truths stand out most clearly in his prophecies.

One of these truths is the greatness and majesty of God. Isaiah realized His overruling sovereignty, to which all nations must be subject. He saw, as Amos and Hosea had seen, the sinfulness of the people, and he felt that it was stupidity and ignorance which prevented them from recognizing that they could not stand against God. He impressed upon them the duty of humility (ii. 10, 11) —

> "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust,
> For fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty.
> The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
> And the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down,
> And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

The same sins appear in the book of Isaiah that we read of in the two former books. Like Amos, he knows that judgment must fall unless the people will turn and let the stream of righteousness flow down. Like Hosea, he knows that God is waiting to forgive if only they will be willing and obedient (i. 18)—

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord,
Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Isaiah constantly calls upon the people to have faith in God, to trust in Him, and all will be well (xxx. 15)—

"In returning and rest shall ye be saved:
In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

And now we may ask, what was Isaiah's belief as to the future of the people to whom God was sending all these messages? Would they attend to the prophet's words, or would those words fall on deaf ears, as the prophecies of Amos and Hosea had done?

From the time of his first call he had a certain hope that not all the people were doomed to punishment. Some there were, a faithful remnant, who would listen to God's words, and would be saved by their "quietness and confidence" in Him. And when you read the book of Isaiah for yourselves, you will see how this thought comes back again and again, and the beautiful pictures which he draws of a redeemed and purified remnant help

to keep hope alive in our hearts too. The words of the Hebrew prophets would make us too sad if it were not that sometimes we seem to see the curtain drawn away which hides the future, and goodness and peace and love reign there, instead of selfishness and greed and pride and cruelty.

The history of Judah during Isaiah's lifetime may be read in the second book of Kings. But we will recall one incident which shews us in what way Isaiah tried to guide the kings, and to make them understand what was God's will for them. It was during the reign of Ahaz, the grandson of Uzziah, that Pekah, the king of Israel, and Rezin, the king of Syria, joined together and went up to Jerusalem to war against it. This alarmed Ahaz, and in the graphic words of the Bible we read: "His heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind" (Is. vii. 2). Then God sent Isaiah, and his son Shear-jashub with him, to go and meet Ahaz, and say—

> "Take heed, and be quiet;
> Fear not, neither let thy heart faint . . .

> It shall not stand,
> Neither shall it come to pass . . .
> If ye will not believe,
> Surely ye shall not be established."

Ahaz was in God's hands; these other kings were to have no power to injure him and his people, if he would only trust in God.

But Ahaz was weak and wicked, and would not attend to God's voice. Isaiah told him most plainly that the kings of Israel and Syria were not to be feared, that they were to be themselves destroyed. Ahaz persisted in sending for aid to the Assyrians, that strong nation beyond the desert to the east, who had already made incursions against Syria and Palestine. The Assyrians came at once, and slew Rezin and Pekah, and conquered their countries; Ahaz was delivered, but he had to pay tribute to the conquering power, and was no longer an independent ruler, owning allegiance only to the King of kings. Isaiah had urged upon Ahaz to confide wholly in God, and not to look for outside help in his difficulty. But when Ahaz disregarded his advice, Isaiah realized that the

Assyrians too were under the rule of Jehovah, the one God. From this time onwards, he steadily impressed upon the king and his successor to be faithful to the covenant with Assyria, and not to try to throw off their yoke.

Ahaz was succeeded by his son Hezekiah, in 715 B.C., seven years after the fall of Samaria, and the captivity of the northern people. Hezekiah was anxious at one time to call in the aid of Egypt to help him against the Assyrians. But Isaiah prevented his doing this in a very strange way. The dignified prophet appeared in the midst of the people in the unexpected garb of a prisoner of war. He had cast off his prophet's mantle, and wore only his inner garment. He declared that God's message to Hezekiah and his people was that the Egyptians would be led away prisoners by the Assyrians (xx. 1–6). This was a parable in action, and was meant to teach the people that it was vain to trust to the help of the Egyptians against the conquering people whom God had allowed to gain supremacy over His own nation.

But though Isaiah saw clearly that the Assyrians

were acting by God's permission, he also knew that they were not to be allowed to destroy the southern kingdom as yet. In God's own time that would come, but not till religion had been more firmly established in the land.

After some time Hezekiah did revolt against Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and Jerusalem was in great danger. A besieging army was actually outside the walls of the city. Then Isaiah raised his voice with a strengthening message from the Lord God of Israel. The Assyrians had done great things, but it had all been by God's guiding power, to fulfil His purpose (xxxvii. 26)—

> "Hast thou not heard long ago,
> How I have done it;
> And of ancient times, that I have formed it?
> Now have I brought it to pass. . . ."

But now the proud nation was to learn that they could not prevail against God (xxxvii. 29)—

> "I will put My hook in thy nose,
> And My bridle in thy lips,
> And I will turn thee back
> By the way by which thou camest."

And so it was. By the direct hand of God, the besieging army was struck down, probably by a pestilence, and forced to relinquish the siege. Jerusalem was delivered ; and Hezekiah and his people knew that it was God's doing. This bit of history can be read in the second book of Kings, as well as in the book of Isaiah. It is introduced here to teach us that wars and political events are all under the controlling power of God. Nation may rise against nation, may make treaties and break them, but only so far as God allows. This is one of Isaiah's most urgent lessons, and in all the important events of the national life, he never ceased to remind king and people of this truth.

You should read for yourselves the story of Hezekiah's illness and Isaiah's mission to him then (xxxviii.), and also of the king of Babylon's embassy, and of Isaiah's solemn prophecy which followed that embassy (xxxix.). For the rest of this chapter we must turn to some other of the prophecies, which are among the most beautiful in the book.

Do you remember the words of Zacharias,

the father of John the Baptist, which we read in the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and which we sing in our Morning Service, under the name of *Benedictus?* Zacharias is there speaking of the Lord God as having visited and redeemed His people—

> "And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David;
> As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

Zacharias refers to the birth of our Saviour Christ, which, as you know, followed the birth of John the Baptist by a few months. And what does he mean by saying—

> "As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets"?

We are often told in the New Testament that the birth of Jesus, and the salvation of the world, had been foretold by the writers in the Old Testament. But Amos and Hosea do not in their books say anything expressly about the coming of the Messiah. When we come to Isaiah it is different, and in some of his writings we find predictions of

a Son of David, of a King ruling in righteousness, which have been only fulfilled by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom upon earth. This is why the Church has appointed lessons from this book to be read on Christmas Day. Let us look more closely at these passages, to learn both what Isaiah meant when he first spoke the words, and how far they apply to our Saviour Christ.

In the seventh chapter we read, on the occasion when Isaiah went out to meet Ahaz, that he told the king that the Lord would give him a sign to shew that he need not fear the power of Syria and of Israel. The sign would be that within a short time a child should be born who should be called Immanuel, a name meaning "God is with us." In the picture at the beginning of this book you will see that the prophet is pointing upwards. In the original picture, from which this is taken, Isaiah is pointing to a vision of the Virgin and Infant Christ in the stable at Bethlehem. This prophecy was evidently meant to encourage Ahaz to trust in God, and to remind him of His abiding

presence with His people. And in the next chapter, when Isaiah is speaking of the king of Assyria's coming into the land of Judah like a flood, he again uses this name—

> "And the stretching out of his wings
> Shall fill the breadth of Thy land,
> O Immanuel."

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, more than seven hundred years later, the evangelist St. Matthew remembered this prophecy of Isaiah's, and saw that it was now literally fulfilled. It was being fulfilled all down the ages, as those who were faithful to God found by experience. He was ever Immanuel, God with them, delivering them from dangers, and letting them feel His Presence through all their trials and sufferings. But it could not be entirely fulfilled until the Incarnation, when the Son of God took our nature upon Him, and taught us the blessed truth that He dwells in us, and we in Him.

The next passage is part of the ninth chapter, which is also read in Church on Christmas Day.

Photo.] [*F. Hollyer.*

"THE PEOPLE WHICH SAT IN DARKNESS."

(*From the Painting by G. F. Watts, R.A.*)

This is one of those prophecies where, as was said before, the veil seems drawn away from the future, for the encouragement of sad hearts. The prophet cries out—

> "The people that walked in darkness
> Have seen a great light:
> They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death,
> Upon them hath the light shined. . . ."

Why?

> "For unto us a Child is born,
> Unto us a Son is given:
> And the government shall be upon His shoulder,
> And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
> Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

In the picture you will see how all the faces are turned in one direction. These represent those who, dwelling in darkness, are looking to the East, and see a great light.

When Isaiah had this vision of the Righteous King, who should be wise in counsel, mighty in power, a Father to His people, and securing peace to His kingdom, he was looking for an earthly ruler of the family of David. This is one of the earliest of the prophecies which speaks clearly of a Messiah

to come, an Anointed One, as the name means, who should rule over Judah as God's representative, and according to His will. He must be of the family of David, and righteousness and peace must reign in the kingdom. The hope of this Messiah to come sustained the hearts of the Jews after their kingdom was destroyed, and was still strong when our Lord was born, as a Son of David. When He began to speak and teach about the kingdom of God, His followers learned that the Messiah had come. He would not establish an earthly kingdom, as they fondly hoped, but a heavenly kingdom, over the hearts and wills of men. Here God would be their King and their Father, and the laws of that kingdom would all be righteous, and the citizens of it would have peace with one another, and in their own souls. And we all are bound to live as faithful citizens of that heavenly kingdom, and also to do our part in bringing the time nearer when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. xi. 15).

One more utterance of the Lord God, speaking by the mouth of His holy prophet Isaiah, must be quoted here from the eleventh chapter—

"And there shall come forth a Shoot out of the stock of Jesse,
And a Branch out of his roots shall bear fruit:
And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and
might,
The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;
And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord:
And He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes,
Neither reprove after the hearing of His ears:
But with righteousness shall He judge the poor,
And reprove with equity for the meek of the earth:
And He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.
And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins,
And faithfulness the girdle of His reins.
And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
And the cow and the bear shall feed;
Their young ones shall lie down together:
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy
In all My holy mountain:

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
As the waters cover the sea.
And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Which shall stand for an ensign of the people;
Unto Him shall the nations seek;
And His resting place shall be glorious."

This is one of those passages in the Bible which we shall do well to read over and over again, until we have made it real to ourselves. It is a great contrast to the actual state of things which Isaiah saw around him in Judah and Jerusalem. He looks forward into the future, and sees at the head of the kingdom a ruler upon whom rest all those gifts of the Spirit for which we pray in our Confirmation Service. "His delight is in the fear of the Lord;" this inspires all his work. He is just in judgment, he cares for the poor and the meek. He is faithful to all his responsibilities. And under his firm and loving rule there is peace and harmony throughout the kingdom. Even the wild animals are tame and gentle, there is no strife between God's creatures. The little children are safe at play with asps and adders, which we

know to be so dangerous. There is no hurting or destruction in all the land. And how has all this come about? It is because "the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Has it ever been realized, this lovely vision which God revealed to Isaiah? Not yet. But it is what we must all pray and work for, for we know that under Christ's rule all things are possible. "The best is yet to be," says the poet Browning, and we are looking forward to better and better things as the years go on, and the earth gets more full of the knowledge of the Lord.

CHAPTER V

MICAH THE COURAGEOUS

When we turn from the prophet Isaiah, the statesman, the dweller in cities, the adviser of kings, to the prophet Micah, we find a contrast and yet a resemblance between the two. Micah lived and prophesied just at the same time as Isaiah. But his life and surroundings seem to have been quite different. He was a countryman like Amos, and he rebuked many of the sins which the herdsman-prophet had denounced. We spoke fully of the teaching of Amos, because he was our first writing prophet, and what was said of him, is equally true of many of his successors. Isaiah had seen and denounced the luxury and self-indulgence, the cruelty and injustice of the people. Micah feels these things most keenly, partly,

perhaps, because he was a countryman himself, and may have seen his friends suffering at the hands of their richer neighbours. His book is full of words like these (ii. 1, 2)—

> "Woe to them that devise iniquity,
> And work evil upon their beds ! . . .
> And they covet fields and take them by violence ;
> And houses, and take them away ;
> So they oppress a man and his house,
> Even a man and his heritage."

Injustice, practised by those who have more wealth and power against the poorer and weaker, is a sin God will not suffer, and He is continually sending His prophets to warn the people against it.

There is no history introduced into the book of Micah, as there is in Isaiah, but we come across a very interesting reference to this prophet in the book of Jeremiah, who lived a hundred years later.

In Jeremiah we read that on one occasion, when he had spoken out very plainly about the judgment that must fall upon Jerusalem unless the people would repent, the prophet's life was in danger from " the priests and the prophets and all

the people" (Jer. xxvi.). But he was saved by certain of the elders of the land, who rose up and reminded the people of Micah the Morasthite. They remembered that Micah had prophesied in the same way as Jeremiah, foretelling that Zion and Jerusalem would be destroyed for the sins of the people. This had been in the days of Hezekiah, King of Judah. But Hezekiah had not put Micah to death for his bold words. On the contrary, he gave heed to them, and repented and made a religious reformation in his land, and destroyed some of the idolatrous images which the people were tempted to worship. It is interesting to know that this reformation was in consequence of Micah's preaching, and it shews us that not all the kings turned a deaf ear to the message of the prophets.

It seems as if Micah must have come up from his country home to Jerusalem at least on this occasion. We nowhere read that Isaiah and he met there, or elsewhere. But we are quite sure, from their books, that they were in sympathy with one another, and were equally grieved by many things which they saw going on in the land.

Micah, however, speaks more strongly and certainly about the destruction which must come upon Jerusalem. Isaiah felt sure the city would be delivered. And so it was, at the last moment, from the Assyrian attack. But Micah was right, too, for in little more than a century the people of Judah were carried away captive by the Chaldæans.

There are two passages in the book of Micah which we ought to examine more closely. One is a beautiful vision in the fourth chapter, part of which we also find almost word for word in the book of Isaiah. We do not know whether the vision was granted to Micah or to Isaiah, or if they both copied it from some older prophet. But this makes no difference. God revealed it to His prophets, and it is a beautiful picture, which helped to make them strong and hopeful when things looked dark and threatening around them.

"In the latter days it shall come to pass,
That the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains,
And it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it.
And many nations shall go and say,

Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
And to the house of the God of Jacob;
And He will teach us of His ways,
And we will walk in His paths:
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
And He shall judge beween many peoples,
And shall reprove strong nations afar off;
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks:
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.
But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree;
And none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

It brings strength and consolation to read such a description of the peace and glad content which lie in the future for that faithful remnant who go on serving and trusting the Lord through all difficulties and temptations. And it gives us a vision of a time when many nations will say, "Come ye, let us go up to the house of God," to learn of His ways and to walk in His paths. Of course the Hebrew prophets thought that all the heathen nations must come *to Jerusalem* to learn faith in God. We know now that the knowledge

of the truth is not confined to one place or nation. But the meaning of the vision is the same. And it ought to make us long for the time when the weapons of war shall be turned into the implements of peaceful labour in the fields, in order to support men's lives, rather than to destroy them.

Micah tells us of himself that he "truly is full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might" (iii. 8). He is fully conscious that the words which he utters are not his own, but God's. There is one great scene in his book, in which the Lord calls upon the people to hear what He has done for them, and to answer for themselves (vi. 1–8). It is like a solemn court of law, and the witnesses are "the mountains and the strong foundations of the earth." "The Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel." He speaks first—

> "O My people, what have I done unto thee?
> Wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me.
> For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,
> And redeemed thee out of the house of bondage;
> And I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam."

He reminds them of all His righteous acts towards them.

Then, with the great mountains standing as witnesses, the people give their answer. They do not defend themselves. Micah puts these words into their mouth—

> "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?
> Shall I come before Him with offerings, with calves of a year old?
> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
> Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

We seem to wait in anxiety for the Lord's rejoinder to this question of the people. Is this, after all, what God wants from them, sacrifices and offerings in greater numbers than before, even to the sacrifice of their own children? But you already know enough of the teaching of the prophets to be sure that God asks something very different from this. Like a strain of solemn music, the words come back to the listening people—

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Let us learn these words by heart, and always associate them with the thought of the prophet Micah. Amos had taught already that God would have His people true and just in all their dealing. Hosea had added the lesson of mercy, and Isaiah the need of humility. Micah speaks of all three—of righteousness, mercy, and humility. These are what the Lord requires of His children.

CHAPTER VI

NAHUM THE TRIUMPHANT, ZEPHANIAH THE STERN, AND HABAKKUK THE WATCHMAN

THE last chapters of the book of Micah, which include the passage we have been last thinking of, were probably written after the death of Hezekiah, during a very sad time in the history of the Jews. Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, had succeeded to the throne on his father's death. He was not a good or religious man, and had no sympathy with the reformation which Hezekiah had carried out. All the old idolatrous ways were restored; and when the prophets gave their message of warning and judgment, Manasseh had them put to death. For a long time no prophet appeared openly among the people, though perhaps during the time of suffering and persecution some prophetic writings

were handed about among the faithful servants of the true God, which helped to keep them brave and strong. Possibly that very passage telling of God pleading with His people was among these.

In this chapter we will consider three prophets, who appeared some years after the close of this sad reign. Their books are not very long, and come one after the other in our Bible. Their names are Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk. We must not think that all the books of the prophets are of equal importance. The four which we have already considered contain more and perhaps deeper teaching than the three just named. But each one of the sixteen has received some inspiration from God, and it is not by chance, but by God's guiding, that their writings have come down to us, in what has been called the 'Divine Library of the Old Testament.'

What then can we learn from the short prophecy of *Nahum?* We do not know much about the prophet, nor even quite certainly where he was living when he wrote his book. Perhaps he was not living in Palestine at all, but in Nineveh, the

Assyrian capital, to which the northern Israelites had been carried away captive a hundred years before. Most of his book refers to Nineveh, which was very soon going to be destroyed. Perhaps you may wonder why we find this book in our Bible, as it does not seem to contain much direct teaching to the Jews, and through them to us. But all through the writings of the prophets we find mention of other nations. From Amos onwards the prophets continually proclaim the truth that all human affairs are under God's guidance and control. The Assyrians for more than a hundred years had been a danger and a terror to God's people. They had oppressed them, and taken tribute from them, and now by the mouth of Nahum Judah utters her glad rejoicing that the great power is itself to be destroyed, and that the Lord Himself will do it. What actually happened was that two other powers, the Babylonians and Medes, besieged Nineveh, and took it very suddenly. Perhaps this was because the river Tigris rose unexpectedly, and ruined the outer walls, which helped

the besiegers very much. The account of this destruction which was coming upon Nineveh occupies two of the three chapters. It is interesting to read it, because it shews how fully Nahum believed that it was God's doing, and that the Assyrians had to be overcome because of their cruelty and wickedness.

But it is in the first chapter that we find the message to ourselves, for which we look in all the books of the prophets. Nahum has faith in God, and he knows that all things are in His hands. He has a care for His people, and He will destroy those who oppose Him. He is all-powerful, and His cause must always triumph in the end. The seventh verse is one we should learn by heart, and it may come back to us some day, when we want a word of cheer and comfort. By-the-by, the name *Nahum* means "consolation," or "comforter," and these words of his correspond very well to his name—

> "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble;
> And He knoweth them that put their trust in Him."

It does not make any difference to his message

whether we think of him as a descendant of one of those Israelites who had been carried away captive to Nineveh from the northern kingdom a century before, or as a dweller in Judah, looking forward to her freedom from oppressors. "The Lord is good," he says—we may safely trust in Him; He is "a stronghold in the day of trouble." All things in heaven and earth are subject to Him. Nothing can harm us, or separate us from Him, but our own wrong-doing.

Nahum, unlike the other prophets about whom we have read, says nothing about the sins of his people. It seems as if he were thinking only of God's power and goodness, and of the coming deliverance from the Assyrians. *Zephaniah*, on the other hand, has a solemn message of judgment to deliver against the people of the Lord. God sends him, as He had sent Amos and Hosea and Isaiah and Micah, to rouse up the Israelites from being careless and self-pleasing, contented with all that went on around them, not thinking of God's near presence. The reign of Manasseh was over, and his grandson Josiah was now king, but there

was still much idolatry in the land ; and those who ought to have led the people by example and teaching to better lives, the princes, the judges, the prophets, the priests, were among the greatest sinners. It is the worst thing that can happen to a country when men like these fill the high posts. We cannot wonder if the mass of ordinary people go astray.

Zephaniah seems to speak of a special judgment which will fall upon the guilty people. He was probably referring to a terrible danger which was threatening all western Asia, and had come near to the borders of Judah. Suddenly, so it seems, there had burst forth from the coasts of the Black Sea, behind the mountains to the north, wild tribes of horsemen. These barbarian invaders galloped through the countries of Western Asia on their fast horses, spreading desolation and death everywhere. This invasion of the Scythians lasted for more than twenty years. We can imagine how terrified the dwellers in villages and small towns must have been, on hearing the report of what these wild heathen had done, of their killing men, women,

and children, destroying homes and crops, leaving the land desolate as they went. As a matter of fact, Judah escaped this awful calamity, but the prophet Zephaniah saw the black cloud hanging over the country, and thought it possible that this might be the means God would employ to punish His people.

His words are very stern, very severe, and are intended to arouse the people to a knowledge of their state (i. 14–16)—

> "The great Day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the Day of the Lord : the mighty man crieth there bitterly.
>
> "That Day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,
>
> "A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high battlements."

Do not the words roll out solemnly, like a Dead March being played on an organ, or slow rumblings of thunder, which prepare us for a great storm about to burst? Do you feel impatient over this very serious bit of our prophets, and anxious to go on to something

you can better understand and make your own? But our time is not wasted if we try to enter into what was in Zephaniah's mind. A nation is like a family in this, that what some of the members do, makes a difference to all the rest. If the judgment was to fall upon the land, the innocent children must suffer as well as the sinful grown-up people. And we cannot learn too early how much God hates sin, and how He will do anything to win His people back to goodness, even though it means suffering to all the nation. A very well-known Latin hymn, used for funeral services, or on other solemn occasions, was written on those verses of Zephaniah. In our English hymn-books it begins—

"Day of Wrath! O day of mourning!"

It was written by Thomas de Celano, who was the companion of St. Francis of Assisi, in the thirteenth century, and wrote his life. In the Roman Church it is called the "Dies Iræ." It is interesting to know how some of our Christian services are thus linked on to this stern prophet of old.

Zephaniah speaks of the Lord as "searching Jerusalem with lamps," to find out and punish those who were contented with their old ways, and thought God would take no notice of them, that said in their heart, "the Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." He pictures the Lord with a lantern in His hand, going through the streets of Jerusalem, lighting up the dark places, uncovering things which the people would rather keep secret. It recalls the picture we most of us know well, of our Lord with His lantern standing outside a fast-closed door. And this verse has made some artists paint pictures of Zephaniah with a lantern in his left hand.

His book is not all full of rebuke and judgments; in the last chapter there are visions of a purified Israel. After the judgment, when they have suffered, and have learnt through their sufferings, more about God and His ways, "an afflicted and poor remnant" are to be left, who will trust in the name of the Lord. It is another of the comforting passages such as we have read in Hosea and Isaiah and Micah—

"The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies;
Neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;
For they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.
Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel;
Be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.
The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy:
The King of Israel, even the Lord is in the midst of thee;
Thou shalt not fear evil any more."

You should read to the end of the chapter, for this passage is a great contrast to the stern message in the earlier part of the book. It shews the blessed side of the judgment; the punishment must fall, but the peace and contentment of which the prophet speaks are not only because the suffering is over, but because the remnant have learnt truth and righteousness, and are good as well as happy. One verse in the first chapter speaks of some who "will be hid in the Day of the Lord's anger." These are the meek and righteous, who have sought the Lord when others have forgotten Him. And the expression "will be hid" reminds us of the meaning of Zephaniah's name, "Jehovah hideth."

Habakkuk is the third of the group of prophets

whom we are considering in this chapter. We do not know exactly when he lived, but it was probably about the same time as Nahum, when Josiah was king of Judah, or possibly later. This prophecy is different from most of those about which we have been thinking, in the way in which it is arranged. The words do not seem to come as a direct message from God to His people by the mouth of Habakkuk. They are in the form of a dialogue between the Lord and His prophet, in which first Habakkuk speaks, and then God answers him.

Habakkuk is like Hosea, and like Jeremiah (of whom we shall hear very shortly), in being sad and sorrowful as he sees what things are going on. First he sees wickedness and injustice, and good people suffering at the hands of the wicked, and he cries out to God to tell him how long this will go on. The Lord answers that He will raise up a nation to punish the wicked people in Judah. These are the Chaldæans (or Babylonians), who would before very long come to Jerusalem and carry the people away captive to

the east, as their northern brethren had been carried away by the Assyrians.

This is a fresh difficulty to Habakkuk. He sees that God will use this nation as His means for punishing His own people. But the Chaldæans are more wicked and cruel than the Jews. How then can the righteous God give them the victory over His chosen people?

The prophet longs for an answer to this question. To describe his eagerness he says—

> "I will stand upon my watch,
> And set me upon the tower,
> And will look forth to see what He will speak with me,
> And what I shall answer concerning my complaint."

Do not these words remind us of the watchmen of old standing on the fortress towers in war-time, eagerly gazing out to see if succour is coming from any direction?

Habakkuk was not disappointed. The Lord answered him and said—

> "Write the Vision, and make it plain upon tables,
> That he may run that readeth it."

It was to be so clearly written that all might see it. Even those running past would catch the meaning, as we may from a large placard on the wall. And what is the vision which Habakkuk is to pass on to others? This—the Chaldæans were puffed up by pride and wickedness, and though they were to be used as God's instruments for a time, they would not endure, while—

"The just shall live by his faithfulness."

This was the message of comfort. Those who are righteous, trusting faithfully in God, have the secret of eternal life. The faithful remnant, of whom Isaiah and Zedekiah speak, will endure. Perhaps Habakkuk wrote these words on a tablet, and set it up in some public place, where all could see. The prophets were often directed by God to do acts like this, in order to attract the people's attention. We have thought of the meaning of two of the prophets' names, and the meaning of this rather strange name is to "caress," or "embrace." Most probably it was given to him as a child. But Luther says, "Habakkuk

means one who embraces or holds up his people as one embraces a weeping person." And this explanation gives us a beautiful thought about this prophet's mission. His own doubts and difficulties he took to God, and asked Him to explain them. And in answer God gave him a message, which not only comforted him, but which he was to share with other sad hearts.

The third chapter of this short book is called in our Bibles a prayer. But it is more like a religious poem, or one of the psalms. It describes God's power and glory, going forth for the salvation of His people, and it ends with a triumphant song of faith in God, whatever troubles and privations may come upon the believer—

> "Though the fig tree shall not blossom,
> Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
> The labour of the olive shall fail,
> And the fields shall yield no meat;
> The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
> And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
> Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
> I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Our prophet's doubts and difficulties seem to

have quite passed away, and he knows that the source of all joy and endurance is in the God of salvation. He has looked out from his watch-tower to see what God would say to him, and not in vain. Nothing can shake him now. "The just shall live by his faithfulness."

Photo.] [*Alinari.*

JEREMIAH.

(*From the Fresco by Michelangelo.*)

CHAPTER VII

JEREMIAH THE STEADFAST, AND THE VISION OF OBADIAH

We must now turn to the prophet Jeremiah, who gives his name to one of the longest books in the Bible. This book tells us more about the prophet himself than any of the other prophetical writings do. We know something about the lives of Amos and Hosea, more about Isaiah, very little indeed about Micah and Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk. But about Jeremiah we know a great deal, and his history is very closely bound up with the history of the nation through many important years. The three prophets of whom we were reading in the last chapter, lived and prophesied in the seventh century before Christ, about one hundred years later than our first four

prophets. And Jeremiah also lived in this century; we know exactly the year when he was first called to his great work. It was in 626 B.C., when King Josiah had been on the throne thirteen years. The king was still quite a young man, and he does not seem to have had much power to turn his people to better ways. You will remember that, under Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, things had gone from bad to worse in Judah. The next king, Amon, only lived two years, and his son Josiah was a child of eight years when he was put upon the throne in 639 B.C. We know from Zephaniah's short solemn prophecy how sinful God's people were at this time, and of the judgments that were coming upon them. It was Jeremiah's hard task to live and prophesy to his unrighteous countrymen for forty years, and to see the doom fulfilled which the prophets before him had foretold.

What kind of man was Jeremiah, and how was he specially fitted for the great work which God laid upon him? Jeremiah was a man of loving, sensitive, sympathetic disposition. He

reminds us constantly of Hosea by the way in which he feels the sorrows and sins of the people. When God first calls him, he does not respond like Isaiah, "Here am I: send me." Jeremiah is diffident, self-distrustful; he feels he is too young, not equal to the great burden of preaching righteousness and judgment to a people who will not listen. His answer is, "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak: for I am a child." But God always prepares us for the work He means us to do. And so the Lord tells Jeremiah that before he was born His divine purpose for him was to send him as a prophet. He was not to say "I am a child," but to go bravely forth to carry God's messages. He would not speak in his own strength. The Lord "touched his mouth," and henceforth he knew that the voice of God was speaking through him.

It was a very solemn commission, and Jeremiah's was a life set apart for much suffering and loneliness. He was to have no home life, no wife and children to love and cherish. Year by year he was to speak and write words of warning

and judgment, which the king and people did not want to hear. His advice would be set aside, and his life would often be in danger from his many enemies. He was to see two kings in succession carried away to captivity, and his own loved Jerusalem and Solomon's temple destroyed; and finally he was to die in a foreign land. Does it seems strange that God should send such suffering upon His faithful servant? There are martyrs who witness to the truth by their lives, as well as by their deaths, and Jeremiah is one of these. And in spite of all his sorrows he is more to be envied than those who disregarded or persecuted him. His memory is handed down to us as the brave prophet, who urged his people to listen to God's words, and trust in Him, and who never withheld the message with which he was entrusted.

What was his special message through all those forty years? To learn that we ought to go through the history from 626 B.C. to 586 B.C. The first important event that happened was the discovery in 621 of a "book of the law" in the Temple.

This book was given by Hilkiah the priest to Shaphan the scribe, and Shaphan read the book before the king. Josiah was greatly struck by the words of the book, which is probably what we have in our Bibles under the name of Deuteronomy, or the Second Law. The teaching of that book is very much the same as the teaching of the prophets. It rebukes the people for idolatry, and warns them of the judgments which will fall upon them unless they turn from their evil ways. Josiah's heart, we read, was tender, and he humbled himself when he heard God's message to him read from the pages of the newly discovered book. And he set himself to a religious reformation, in obedience to the commands contained in the book. The idolatrous worship was done away with, and the wicked practices which went along with the idolatry were put down. And the "high places" all over the country, where the people had been used to offer sacrifices, were destroyed, because the worship had not been pure there. And now the people were to come to Jerusalem only, for their public worship, three times a year, for the three great feasts. All

this we think must have pleased Jeremiah at the time. He saw once more a righteous king, doing what was pleasing to God, and trying to help his people to be good, and to offer pure worship. But we do not read that Jeremiah took any active part in the reformation. And indeed it seems as if it had come too late to make a lasting difference in the land. In the earlier part of his ministry, it certainly seems as if there was still room for repentance. God's message through him reminds us of Hosea's words. Jeremiah says—

"Thus saith the Lord, I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown."

"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, 'My Father, Thou art the Guide of my youth'?"

"Return, thou backsliding Israel, I will not look in anger upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord."

"Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord. . . . O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved."

We might find more verses which speak of the possibility that they might turn and be forgiven.

But far the larger part of these prophecies, even in the earlier part of the book, speak as sadly and severely of the sins of the people as Amos or Isaiah had spoken. What we feel, as we read one chapter after another, is the bitterness of the prophet's sorrow over the sins of his countrymen, or over the punishment that must come upon them. And from this we learn the tenderness of the Father's heart towards those who do wrong. If His servants the prophets feel so keenly, what must the Lord feel, whose messengers they are?

The judgment was drawing nearer and nearer. Josiah, the righteous king, fell in battle against the Egyptians at Megiddo, in 608 B.C. This seemed to be the end of hope for the land. His son, Jehoahaz, was put on the throne. But after three months he was taken prisoner to Egypt. And Pharaoh Necho, the Egyptian king, who was now supreme ruler over Judah, placed Josiah's eldest son, Eliakim, on the throne, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. We read much about Jeremiah during the reign of Jehoiakim. After Josiah's death, the people seem to have fallen back into

idolatry. Some openly gave up their faith in God, and others tried by offering more and more sacrifices to win back God's favour, forgetting those great words of Samuel's, "To obey is better than sacrifice," or of Micah's, "What doth the Lord require of thee?"

Jeremiah goes on preaching, giving God's message without ceasing, in spite of the indifference with which it is listened to. This often brings him into danger. On one occasion we read (in the twenty-sixth chapter) when he had been prophesying the destruction of the temple and city, the priests and the prophets wanted to put him to death. But Jeremiah boldly declared that the Lord had sent him to utter these words, and to call upon them to amend their ways and their doings, and to obey the voice of the Lord. He knew he was in their power, but he reminded them that if they put him to death they would bring innocent blood upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The scene would make a fine picture —the brave prophet, standing before his enemies, alone against many, strong in the knowledge that

he was God's messenger, and believing even yet that repentance might save them. Does it remind you of another prophet, of New Testament times, Stephen, the first martyr for the Christian faith, boldly confronting his accusers, reminding them of their own and their fathers' sins?

"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One" (Acts vii. 51, 52). But Stephen's martyrdom followed immediately. Jeremiah's life was spared for the time, by the remembrance of Micah before Hezekiah, as we have already seen.

In the fifth year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was bidden by the Lord to take a roll, and write down all the words which He had spoken by His prophet. Even yet there seems a ray of hope: "It may be that the house of Judah may . . . return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." Jeremiah obeyed God's voice, and his scribe Baruch wrote down all the words in a roll. The writing was then taken to

the king as he sat in his winter house with the princes and courtiers. But after hearing three or four leaves read, Jehoiakim took the roll, cut it in pieces, and cast it into the fire which was burning before him in the brazier. So little did Jehoiakim care for God's solemn message of warning and doom! The courtiers around him were not horrified or alarmed by the king's conduct. "They were not afraid nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard these words."

We must hasten on with the story. You will remember that Nineveh fell before the besieging armies of the Babylonians and Medes in 607 B.C. The Babylonians to the east, and the Egyptians to the south-west of Palestine, were now the two great powers whom Judah had to fear. For a time Judah was paying tribute to Egypt. But in 605 a great battle was fought between Babylon and Egypt at Carchemish, in which Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, was completely victorious. In 601 he marched into Judæa, and Jehoiakim became his vassal. But in three years he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Before the

punishment could fall upon him for this rebellion, he died, and was succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar brought his army against Jerusalem, besieged it, and forced Jehoiachin to surrender. He was carried prisoner to Babylon, with all the upper classes and principal people, in the year 597 B.C. Only the poorer classes were left, and over them was placed a third son of Josiah, Zedekiah, brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim.

All this time, and throughout the reign of Zedekiah, Jeremiah did not cease to urge the people to submit to God's will, who had subjected them to Babylon. Like all true prophets, Jeremiah saw in the events of history the mighty purposes of God working themselves out. He saw that it was vain to try to cast off the yoke which had been put upon them by God, and in punishment of their misdeeds. He wrote a beautiful letter to the exiles in Babylon, to comfort and encourage them (xxix. 1–14). They were not to be restless in that far-off land, but to accept God's will. They were to make homes for themselves, and pray for

the peace of the city whither the Lord had carried them—and then, in seventy years, they were to be brought back to their own country.

"For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end. And ye shall call upon Me, and ye shall pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart."

It is beautiful to think that the very judgment and captivity which they had so dreaded, would be turned by God into a blessing, if it made His erring people come back to Him, like the Prodigal Son in the parable, and like Hosea's faithless wife.

Zedekiah seems to have cared more for Jeremiah's words than Jehoiakim had done, but the people were mostly against the prophet. It made them very angry to be told that if they rebelled against the king of Babylon, Jerusalem and the Temple would be utterly destroyed. One day the princes were so furious that they wanted again to put Jeremiah to death; the king did not dare to defend him, and he was let down by cords into a miry dungeon, and left without bread or

water. But one of the king's servants told Zedekiah what had been done to the prophet, and the danger he was in of starving in his dark dungeon. This time the king sent servants to save Jeremiah from such a dreadful death. He must have known in his heart that the prophet was in truth God's messenger, and that he ought to pay heed to his words. But he had not the courage to submit to the Chaldæans. He rebelled against them, and all Jeremiah's words were fulfilled. The city was besieged and destroyed. Zedekiah's eyes were put out, and he and almost all the rest of the people were carried captive to Babylon. Only some of the poorest of the people, "who had nothing," were left in the land of Judah. Jeremiah himself was free to go or stay, and he decided to remain in his poor deserted country, with Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the cities of Judah.

All this happened in 586 B.C., and was the end of the independent national life of the Jews. But there was to be one more act in the strange

drama of Jeremiah's life. Gedaliah, the governor, was murdered by a band of men led by a member of the royal family. This alarmed the people who were left, the captains of the forces and others, and they made up their minds to escape into Egypt. They were afraid of the anger of the Chaldæans. Once more Jeremiah lifted up his voice, and warned them not to go into Egypt. It was God's will that they should stay in their own land. Once more they disobeyed his voice, and fled to Egypt, taking the prophet and Baruch with them. And there the story ends. We suppose that Jeremiah's long life and suffering ended in that foreign land.

In this short account we have been obliged to leave out many scenes from Jeremiah's life which are very interesting, and which you must read for yourselves in his book. One thing specially marks the way in which God gave him His messages. Often he was bidden to do some outward act, which would be a sort of parable in action, to attract the people's attention, or to make some truth more plain to himself. You should search for these symbolic acts, as they are

called, in the book of Jeremiah. At one time he had to take a long journey, and hide a girdle which he had worn, in a hole of the rock. Then to fetch it again "after many days." When he dug it up, of course it was spoilt and could no longer be worn. This taught the lesson that the Jews, who had been as close to God as a girdle to its wearer, had been ruined and come to nothing because of their disobedience. So with other like acts. Have you ever been into a china manufactory, and seen the wonderful way in which the clay is shaped by the potter on the wheel to whatever form he chooses? This sight, of the potter at his wheel, taught Jeremiah how God moulds the lives of men and nations by His power. We are as clay in His hands, and, like the potter, He has a design for each one of us. Look out the story of the earthen bottle, and of the Rechabites, and find for yourselves the lesson God taught by these incidents.

Lastly, let us look at Jeremiah's teaching as a whole. We must not think that it contains nothing but stern judgments and threatenings.

We have already read some of the tender verses which remind us of Hosea. Through all his sadness Jeremiah sees in the future the hope of a penitent and restored Israel. He knows that what God wants for His children is a new heart —goodness and love taking the place of disobedience and wilfulness. And God teaches him that that is what will be in the future.

> "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am Jehovah;
> And they shall be My people, and I will be their God:
> For they shall return unto Me with their whole heart."

Most of these spiritual and comforting teachings are found in chapters xxx.–xxxiii., which have been called the "Book of Consolation." Here we find prophecies of the new kingdom under the righteous king, of whom we have already heard in earlier prophets. We have only room for one more quotation, but it is a very important one, and we should take it as our special lesson to remember from Jeremiah's writings. The sinful people had broken the old covenant with God, made on Mount Sinai, when the laws were written

on tables of stone. Now there is to be a new covenant, on the tables of the heart—

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord:' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."

Jeremiah lived in very troubled times; he saw a great deal of wickedness and a great deal of suffering around him; he endured much suffering himself. But all this did not shake his faith in the least. He knew that God was working out His great purposes through all the distress and disasters that befell the country. He knew that the true religion is that which is written on men's hearts, and he looked forward confidently to the time when all would know God, the children and the ignorant people, as well as the wise and learned. And that time, we believe and pray, is coming nearer as the years go on. Each one of us must play our part in furthering the Kingdom

of God, which brave, true-hearted Jeremiah saw established over the hearts and wills of men.

Before closing this chapter we will consider a very short prophecy which may have been written just after the exile. It is called in the Bible, "The vision of Obadiah." We know nothing about the prophet who wrote the book, and we must not confuse him with the other Obadiah, the servant of Ahab, who preserved the "prophets of the Lord" from Jezebel's persecution. This short book does not contain spiritual teaching like the other prophetic books. It is an indignant reproach against the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. Although this nation and Israel were both descended from Isaac, they were bitterly opposed to one another. Obadiah is especially hot against the Edomites for the part they had played when Nebuchadnezzar besieged and took Jerusalem, and carried the people away captive in 586 B.C. The Edomites had sided with the Chaldæans (ver. 11)—

"In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance, and foreigners entered

into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them."

We can imagine how indignant the prophet, who had probably lived through the horrors of the siege, and was perhaps himself an exile in Babylon, must have felt at the cruel and unbrotherly conduct of the Edomites. But though city and Temple were destroyed, Obadiah will not believe that God's people are given over to destruction. They would return to Mount Zion, and when the Edomites were judged and swept away with the other heathen nations, the kingdom (of Judah) should (again) be the Lord's. Obadiah does not think of the kingdom in the same spiritual way as Isaiah and Jeremiah do. But his prophecy, written at such a dark time in the nation's history, shews what faith he had that God's people, who had been trained and taught in a different way from the heathen nations, would have a lasting history, under God's rule. His faith and hope must have helped to sustain and comfort his companions in exile. His prophecy was literally fulfilled, when the nation

returned from Babylon. And it has been and is being fulfilled in a wider sense than Obadiah himself thought of. The one and only "Saviour has come up on Mount Zion," and the kingdom is gradually becoming more and more subject to its true Lord (Obad. 21).

CHAPTER VIII

EZEKIEL THE EXILE

In the last chapter we came to a very great event in the history of the Jewish nation. Their city and Temple were destroyed, and they themselves were taken away by their victorious enemies to live in Babylon, and in the surrounding country. It is difficult for us to understand what an immense difference this made to the whole life of the people. If we could imagine such a thing happening to ourselves, as the king and the nobles, and the larger part of the army, and the clergy, and skilled artisans all being forced to go and live in a distant country, in Russia for instance, even that would not be quite such a change of all our ideas. For the Russians are Christians, and in many ways live as we do. But to the Jews the

most dreadful part of the exile was their feeling that, in leaving Judæa and the ruined Temple behind them, they were leaving God and His worship also. The Chaldæans were heathens, and the Jews thought that Jehovah their God could not be worshipped away from Jerusalem.

The "Second Law" commanded that sacrifices should only be offered in Jerusalem. But the exile taught the people many precious lessons; and among these lessons they learned that God is the God of all nations, and that He can be worshipped everywhere by the true believer. They could not offer sacrifices, it is true, in that distant land, but they had places for prayer by the waterside, where they could gather together and pray to their Father in heaven, and practise the ceremonial washings which were commanded in their law. We must not suppose that all remained faithful to their religion in exile. Many of them had been idolators and unbelievers in their own land, and no doubt the magnificent Babylonian temple and the idolatrous worship there attracted many of the Jews, and they forgot all the teaching of the

prophets, and became like the people of the land. But there was a faithful remnant, as Isaiah and Zephaniah and others had foretold, and these drew more closely together, as people do who are sharing a common trouble ; and their faith grew stronger and their worship more pure through the adversities which God sent upon them.

We do not know much about the circumstances of their life during the exile. Some of them seem to have been at liberty to build houses and plant gardens, and they perhaps gradually came to share the life of their conquerors. Of course the children would soon forget Judæa, and there would be others born there who knew nothing of any home but Babylon. For the exile lasted for sixty-one years, which leaves time for a great many people to die, and for others to be born. And those who went into exile as little children, if they lived to return, would go back as elderly men and women. Probably many had to bear hardships and unkind treatment from the Babylonians. And all the time there would be loyal hearts turning in love and yearning to

Jerusalem, and looking forward to a possible return from captivity. Two great prophets lived and wrote during the time of the exile, one during the first twenty years, the other near the time of the return. The first of these prophets is Ezekiel; the second is not known to us by name, but he wrote the second part of the book which is called by Isaiah's name.

Ezekiel was taken to Chaldæa in the first captivity, in 597 B.C., eleven years before the fall of Jerusalem. His book is a very long one, and his prophecies must have been most sustaining to the hearts of his fellow-countrymen. Like Isaiah, he tells us the exact date of his call to be a prophet; and to him also the call came with a wonderful vision, as it had come to Isaiah. If you look at the picture you will see something of what that vision was, though not of course the light and the glory which accompanied it. Ezekiel saw four living creatures, which seemed to him to have the likeness of a man. Each creature had four faces, and four wings; the front face was that of a man, the face on the right side was that of a lion, on the left of

Photo.] [*Alinari.*

THE VISION OF EZEKIEL.

(*From the Painting by Raphael.*)

an ox, and behind of an eagle. Beside each of the creatures was a wheel, and the rims of the wheels were full of eyes round about. These living creatures and the wheels "went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went." Above the creatures was a *Man* seated upon a sapphire throne. There was a wonderful rainbow brightness round about (i. 28)—

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of One that spake."

It is not possible to know all that Ezekiel learned from this vision. But we may believe he learned that all the universe and all living creatures are subject to a Divine guidance. That verse, which is repeated more than once, "they went every one straight forward; whither the Spirit was to go, they went," makes us think of God's spirit leading and inspiring us and all men. And the *Man* presiding over the living creatures represents as in an allegory the One Lord over all, who took our nature upon Him, to reveal

God to man. You should read the description of the whole vision, and then turn to the fourth chapter of the Revelation. There St. John tells us of One sitting upon a throne in heaven, and of four living creatures, with the faces of a man, of a lion, of a calf, and of a flying eagle. These are all giving glory and honour and thanks to Him that sitteth on the throne. And when the time came that four evangelists were inspired by the Spirit to write down the story of our Lord's life in the gospels, and pictures were painted of the four, the painters liked to depict them each with one of these four symbols; either the lion, or the ox, or the flying eagle, or the human face. And so the imagery of Ezekiel's vision makes a part of our Christian art to this day.

A great deal of God's teaching to Ezekiel is symbolic, as we found in the case of Jeremiah. He began to prophesy some years before the fall of Jerusalem. It was very difficult for the exiles in Babylon, as it was for the inhabitants who were left in Judæa, to believe that Jerusalem and the Temple could be destroyed. So Ezekiel is bidden

to take a tile, and make a picture or carving on it of Jerusalem, and to make a mimic siege and capture of the city. This was to be a sign to the people of Israel. Does this seem a childish thing to command a great prophet to do? But we must remember that many people learn things more quickly through the eye than by direct preaching or teaching; and neither God nor His prophet thought any means too small to bring home His messages to the hearts of His people. They had this hard lesson to learn, that for the sins of Israel Jerusalem must be destroyed, and a great deal of Ezekiel's prophecy is taken up with enforcing this lesson. There is not space to tell you of many of the symbolic actions and signs of which we read. It is more important to think of the teaching of Ezekiel, which made a lasting impression upon those who heard him. Ezekiel was a priest as well as a prophet, and he seems to be the first of either priests or prophets to take an individual interest in each separate person among his hearers. In this respect he is more like our own clergy. The Temple was gone. There were no more

sacrifices to be offered, and Ezekiel set himself under God's inspiration to help the people in their personal religious life. He spoke much of keeping the sabbaths, as one way in which they could remember God, especially among their heathen surroundings. He taught them much about repentance, and turning to God, and leaving their sins behind them. The verse which is so often read as the opening sentence of our Morning Service comes from the Book of Ezekiel (xviii. 27)—

> "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

Again and again Ezekiel repeats this teaching in different words. We are each one responsible for our own actions, and God will accept us if we are sorry for our wrong-doing, and turn to Him "in whom is Life," with a real desire to do better. One thing which the exiles felt it hard to understand was that they were suffering for the sins of their fathers under Manasseh and other kings. Perhaps many of them had not disobeyed God, or been

idolatrous themselves; and they quoted this proverb:

"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

How could this be just? It is quite true that children often do suffer because of their fathers' sins. But then suffering does not always, or perhaps chiefly, mean that God is angry with those who suffer. Very often He knows that the suffering will help to make them good, and He who *is* Goodness, as well as Justice and Love, allows the punishment to fall upon the innocent because it will bring them nearer to Him. This is a very deep subject, and we cannot dwell upon it here. Only we must remember how Ezekiel teaches that the way to God is always open, that goodness leads to Life, and that wrong-doing, so long as it is unrepented of, leads to Death.

You will remember Jeremiah's teaching about the new covenant which was to be written on the hearts of men. Ezekiel dwells upon this thought too, and in Chapter xi., when he is giving a

message from God about the return from captivity, he says :

"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you ; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh : that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them ; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Ezekiel has much to say about false prophets who deceive the people by their words. This is God's message to them :

"Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing ! They have seen vanity and lying divination that say : 'The Lord saith' ; and the Lord hath not sent them : and they have made men to hope that the word should be confirmed."

Ezekiel knew that it was not an easy calling to be a prophet of the Lord. It needs an ear continually open to God's words, and a life lived in communion with Him ; and a spirit like Jeremiah's, ready to suffer anything rather than withhold God's message. And this is true about every one who wants to be a real help to his fellow-men. He must not think of what they will wish to hear ; but of what is true, and what is God's message to them.

Again and again we read of the elders of Israel coming to Ezekiel, and sitting before him, to hear what the Lord had to say to them. We do not read of his being in danger from them, when his message was one they did not want to hear. But we find that, like Hosea, his own private sorrow was a means which God used to teach the people a needed lesson. The story is told in very simple and touching words in Chapter xxiv. :

"The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke : yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud ; make no mourning for the dead, bind thy headtire upon thee, and put thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. So I spake unto the people in the morning ; and at even my wife died : and I did in the morning as I was commanded."

In eastern countries the outward signs of mourning for a lost friend are more important and more noticeable than with us. And it must have been a great additional trial to Ezekiel to conceal his grief from every one, and to go on with his public life as usual. But he lived not for himself, but for God and his countrymen, and

this absence of outward mourning was to teach the people that they must accept the destruction of Jerusalem as God's doing, and not rebel against His will.

There are beautiful promises of a restored Israel in this book, such as we have read of in other prophets. And it is Ezekiel who first speaks of God as the Good Shepherd, that tender image which we find in the twenty-third psalm, and in the Second Isaiah, and, of course, in St. John's Gospel. In Ezek. xxxiv. we read—

"As a shepherd seeketh out his flock . . . so I will seek out My sheep. . . . I Myself will feed My sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick : they shall dwell securely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods . . . and none shall make them afraid. . . . And ye, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men and I am your God, saith the Lord God."

There is one well-known vision of Ezekiel's which must not be omitted (xxxvii.). He was taken into a valley where there must have been a great battle, and it was full of the dry bones of the men who had been killed there. And in his vision

Ezekiel saw that by God's command the breath came into the bodies of the slain, "and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." This was a sign to the house of Israel that their nation would live again, by God's power, and that He would place them in their own land. And beyond the special sign to Israel, it has always been looked upon as an allegory of the resurrection which God has promised to us all after death; and of the rising again, which, by God's Spirit, is always possible, even to those who 'are dead in trespasses and sins.'

There is much that is comforting and sustaining in Ezekiel's prophecies, and the last part of his book is full of visions of the restored Jerusalem, when the long captivity would be ended. The name of the ideal city would be "The Lord is there" (xxxviii. 35), and this name in itself was an assurance of the peace and safety in which the inhabitants would dwell. In our next chapter we shall come nearer to the time of the longed-for return from captivity.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHET OF THE RETURN FROM EXILE

THE last of Ezekiel's prophecies seem to have been spoken about 570 B.C., sixteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, and the final captivity. The other great prophet of the exile began to give his message perhaps thirty years later, within a few years of the return. We know nothing about him, not even his name. We find his writings bound up with Isaiah's prophecies, and people have therefore supposed that they were written by Isaiah. This is now known not to be the case. But though it would be very interesting to know something of the life of one of the greatest of the prophets, yet it is not of real importance. What really matters is to know something of his message. The writings of this Second Isaiah contain many

of the noblest and most beautiful passages in the Bible, and some of them are among the best known. We have not space to give long quotations, and you will be able to read and enjoy much of Second Isaiah for yourselves.

The opening words of the prophecy (Is. xl. 1) are a message of comfort and encouragement to the exiles. The time of their trial and suffering was nearly ended, and the release from captivity was in sight. How was this to be? The agent God would employ was the Persian king, Cyrus, who, after conquering other countries in the east, marched against Babylon in 538 B.C., took the city without difficulty, and became the ruler over the Jewish captives as well as over the Babylonians.

The prophet's words break upon our ears like the joy-bells on a festival morning. He is the herald of the approaching deliverance. Those of you who have heard Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*, can never forget the sound of the opening words—

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God,
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,
That her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned:

For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.
The voice of one that crieth,
Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted,
And every mountain and hill shall be made low:
And the crooked shall be made straight,
And the rough places plain:
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together:
For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.
O Zion, that bringest good tidings,
Get thee up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings,
Lift up thy voice with strength;
Lift it up, be not afraid;
Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!"

We can picture to ourselves a little of what the Jews felt when they first heard these words. In Babylon they had heard of the conquering monarch who was subduing the nations before him, and their hearts beat high with hope that here was to be the deliverer who would set them free from the Babylonians. We must not think that the prophet's message was only or chiefly the promise of return. What he teaches is the same lesson that Isaiah had enforced upon Ahaz and Hezekiah,

the greatness and majesty of the One True God, Who has made heaven and earth, Who controls and directs all human affairs. It is He who has now raised up Cyrus to carry out His Divine purpose in the deliverance of His people. This is how the prophet speaks of Him—

> "To whom then will ye liken Me,
> Or shall I be equal?
> Saith the Holy One.
> Lift up your eyes on high, and behold
> Who hath created these things,
> That bringeth out their host by number:
> He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might,
> For that He is strong in power; not one faileth."

This great God of all the universe has not forgotten the people for whom He has done so much in the past. The yearning exiles are to return to their own country, and it is God who will take them back.

> "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard
> That the everlasting God, the Lord,
> The Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? . . .
> Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand,

And His arm shall rule for Him:
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His work before Him."

And now we have the tender personal care of which Ezekiel had already taught the people, expressed in words which dwell in our hearts like a strain of gentle music—

"He shall feed His flock like a shepherd:
He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom,
And shall gently lead those that are with young."

This great prophet is a poet too; with his insight into the true meaning of things, he unites another great gift, the power of expressing his thoughts in harmonious and beautiful language. His wide vision sees the great God exalted over all the universe, and also the one people whom He has specially blessed and endowed with a peculiar mission. Israel is now to return to her own land, and she has a great future before her. This Second Isaiah has learned, and now proclaims unfalteringly the great truth that, as God is the God of all nations, His purpose for them is that all

should come to know and serve Him. And who is to be the evangelist, the missionary, to all other nations? The people of Israel. This is why they were chosen, set apart by their peculiar history, and taught by the great succession of prophets of whom we have read. They are to bring the knowledge of God to the Gentiles. Israel is to be the servant of the Lord in a special sense. And it is the passages which describe the mission of the Servant on which we ought to dwell. As we know, Israel had not been faithful to her high calling in the past. The prophet begins sadly enough (xlii. 19, 20)—

> "Who is blind, but My Servant?
> Or deaf, as My messenger that I send? . . .
> Thou seest many things, but thou observest not;
> His ears are open but he heareth not."

This is speaking of the nation as a whole, but the "faithful remnant" would be true to the Lord, and would be the means of spreading true religion throughout the world. The prophet continues (xlii. 1–4)—

> "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold;
> My chosen, in whom My soul delighteth:

I have put My Spirit upon him;
He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles."

Judgment does not here mean a "sentence of justice," as we read in some passages, but the "true religion;" and this was to be taught by the Servant to all the nations.

"A bruised reed shall he not break,
A dimly burning wick shall he not quench:
He shall bring forth judgment in truth.
He shall not fail nor be discouraged,
Till he have set judgment in the earth:
And the isles shall wait for his law."

In fulfilling his mission the Servant will have much suffering to endure. But he knows that it is God who sends him, and will give him strength (l. 5–7).

"The Lord God hath opened mine ear,
And I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.
I gave my back to the smiters,
And my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair;
I hid not my face from shame and spitting.
For the Lord God will help me:
Therefore shall I not be confounded:
Therefore have I set my face like a flint,
And I know that I shall not be ashamed."

Both these passages speak of the Servant as a

person, but this is what many of the prophets do in speaking of the nation, and here the Second Isaiah, perhaps, had in mind the ideal Israel, the faithful few who would understand and carry out God's purpose. But there is one more passage which speaks even more fully of a Person who will suffer many things for the iniquity of others. We find this in the fifty-second and fifty-third chapters which are read in Church on Good Friday. You should read this passage (from chapter lii. 13), and in the description of the suffering Servant you will recognize the work and suffering of our Blessed Lord. No prophecy in the Old Testament has been so exactly fulfilled as this. And it is partly, or perhaps chiefly, these chapters that make the writings of the Second Isaiah so dear to the hearts of all Christian people. There are many other magnificent passages in this book. We read of the tender care of the Father for His children, of the joyous return when the ransomed of the Lord should

> "Come with singing unto Zion;
> And everlasting joy shall be upon their head."

There have been pictures of this peace and joy in earlier prophets, but no prophet has so many or in such detail. But through all these chapters our hearts go back to the suffering Servant; and as we read of His silence, His meekness, and above all of His bearing the sin of many, and of His making many righteous, we know that there has only been One who perfectly fulfilled all this, which the Second Isaiah was inspired to see and reveal to others. It is quite true that Israel was God's servant, and was commissioned to hold up the light of the true faith to the nations. Quite true, too, that the faithful remnant endured much innocent suffering caused by the sin of others. But it was not until our Saviour Jesus Christ came to earth that men knew all the meaning of the prophet's words. There is one verse which perhaps more than the rest brings home to us the meaning and depth of these passages. It is where the prophet says—

> "He shall see of the travail of His soul,
> *And shall be satisfied.*"

Our Lord was willing to endure, and He knew,

and knows, that His suffering will not be in vain. His work will be accomplished, and the world will be redeemed.

Perhaps you may ask what the Jews themselves understood by these words about the Servant. We cannot quite tell. But they may have learnt part of the lesson, if not all. If the people were to be used by God as His servant, they must be prepared to suffer much, and to be an example to others, and in that way they would turn many to righteousness. These are thoughts on which we cannot now dwell. As the years go on you will be able to enter more fully into the deep teaching of the unnamed prophet of the restoration. Perhaps to have read even these few words about him may make the lessons you hear read in Church from his writings more real and interesting.

CHAPTER X

HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH, THE TEMPLE BUILDERS, AND MALACHI, THE MESSENGER

And now the end of the exile has come. After taking Babylon in 538 B.C., Cyrus gave permission to the Jews to return to their own land, and those who wished to do so set forth in the spring of 537 B.C. Not a very large number of the captives went back after all. Fifty or sixty years had passed since the captivity had begun. Most of the original exiles must have died. Many were too old, or too firmly established in Chaldæa to wish to undertake the long journey. Not more than forty-two thousand, if so many, made their way back to Judæa, to find their city and temple in ruins, and the whole country only a poor outlying province of the great Persian empire. There is a very

great contrast between the splendid hopes and descriptions of the restoration, which we read in the Prophets, especially in Second Isaiah, and what really happened. The returned exiles were poor, and had not energy enough to begin to rebuild the temple ; then various misfortunes fell upon them—bad harvests, drought, and the like. Some may have been more prosperous, as they seem to have built good houses for themselves ; but for the most part they were poor, discouraged, and disappointed of their hopes. Perhaps the foundations of the new Temple were laid, but the rebuilding was strongly opposed by the Samaritans, who were descended partly from some of the original ten tribes of northern Israel, and partly from the settlers from Assyria, whom the Assyrian king had sent to occupy the land after the Israelites had been carried away captive long before.

Seventeen years passed away, and no prophet's voice was uplifted to cheer or exhort the disheartened people. But God had not forgotten them, and in the autumn of 520 B.C. (we know the very month and day on which the message was

sent) the Word of the Lord came to them by Haggai the prophet. It was a short message, but it startled them into energy at once (i. 4, 5).

"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your ceiled houses, while this house lieth waste? Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways."

This is what God calls upon them to do—to look back upon the past years, and the way in which they had acted. Their first duty on returning to their country was to rebuild their Temple; to have once more an "outward and visible sign" of God's "inward and spiritual" presence with them. The kingdom was to be the Lord's; that is what the prophets had told them. They had no earthly king ruling over them. They were subjects only of a distant over-lord. Henceforth their mission was to hold forth to all other nations the example of true religion.

But they had not considered all this. They had allowed themselves to be disheartened by difficulties, and had only thought of their own homes and occupations, while God's house was

allowed to lie waste. So He sent them troubles, drought, and bad harvests to remind them of their neglected duty. Haggai is very practical in his directions. He says (i. 8)—

> "Go up to the hill country, and bring wood and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord."

The message had an immediate effect. The people, with their two leaders at their head, Zerubbabel, the prince of the house of David, and Joshua, the high priest, "obeyed the voice of the Lord their God." The further message which stirred up their spirit was the one which inspires all our work for God.

> "I am with you, saith the Lord."

They set to work on the building, and in a few weeks they had another message through Haggai. Those who remembered the glory of the former temple were not to be discouraged at the sight of this humbler building. Haggai cries to them with words of encouragement, which we, too, must lay to heart (ii. 4)—

"Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord: and be strong, O Joshua; and be strong, all ye people of the land, and work, for I am with you."

It was the same God who had led them through all their past history. They were to do their best, with God's blessing, remembering that all that they put into the building was really the Lord's. He promised them to fill the house with glory, and to give peace in that place.

This is a short prophecy, but it teaches us much. Few words spoken by the prophets have been so promptly acted upon. It is an inspiring thought that God is watching over all our lives, and will send us just the word we need to recall us to our neglected duties. However the message comes, whether by trial and sorrow, or by the direct encouraging word of one of God's messengers, we shall find our strength and happiness in responding to the call. And in our appointed work we shall find God is strengthening our hands, and leading us on to better and better things.

We can picture the scenes of their activity—some of the men up in the hill country cutting

down the wood, others carting it to Jerusalem, others digging foundations, or sawing planks; and the figure of the prophet looking on, now at this group of workmen, now at that, with his words of cheer and encouragement. This bit of our story is full of living human interest to us all, and may often come to our minds with a message of hope in the days which lie before us.

Our next prophet, *Zechariah*, lived at the same time as Haggai. The book to which he gives his name was not all written by him. We must only think now of the first eight chapters of that book. Much of this prophecy is of a different kind to those of the older prophets. They had visions occasionally; but more often they received their message directly from God. Zechariah is taught chiefly by visions. Again, the older prophets were very conscious of God's immediate presence with them. Zechariah receives his inspiration for the most part from an angel sent by God.

We cannot dwell long upon the eight Visions;

but some part of what Zechariah learned from them must be made clear.

When he saw horsemen on different coloured horses riding through the world, he learned that God would destroy the heathen nations, and that Zion would be restored to independence. When he saw four horns of iron, and four smiths ready to shatter them, he learned the same lesson. When he saw a man with a measuring line, measuring Jerusalem, this taught him that Jerusalem would be so thickly populated that it would be like country villages without walls. The Lord Himself would be the only wall the city would need. From other visions he learned that all the sins of the people would be taken away, and that they would be supplied with grace and strength from the Lord.

Zechariah's prophecies, like Haggai's, encouraged the people to go on with the building of the temple. This word of the Lord came to Zerubbabel (iv. 6, 9)—

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it."

This prophecy, when it was fulfilled, would prove that God had really sent Zechariah as His prophet. Both Haggai and Zechariah look forward to the time when the Messiah, the righteous ruler, should be established over the nation. Haggai says that when God shall have overcome the kingdoms of the nations (Hag. ii. 23)—

"In that day will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, My servant . . . saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet : for I have chosen thee."

Zechariah is also bidden to take silver and gold, and make crowns for Zerubbabel and for Joshua, in token that they should both be anointed rulers over the people ; one king and the other priest—

"And the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

This prophecy was not literally fulfilled, but, like the other promises of a Messiah, it helped to keep alive in the hearts of the people the hope of a righteous ruler of the house of David who would come some day, and be the true representative of God's unseen government. When our Lord came

on earth, His disciples saw in Him the true Messiah, of Whom "Moses in the law, and the prophets did write" (St. John i. 45).

In the Visions, and in the explanations of them by the mouth of angels, Zechariah learned much of the future fortunes of the nation, which must have encouraged them very much. And in the constant promises that it would be God Himself who would be with them, and give them grace and His Spirit to help them in their future life, Zechariah shews himself a true prophet.

There are two other passages in which he has no outward Vision, and in which his message recalls the teaching of Amos and Hosea, of Isaiah and Micah, who had prophesied, as you know, in the eighth century, two hundred years before this. You will remember how those earlier prophets were always repeating the truth that God wanted men to repent, and leave their sins behind them, and strive to obey Him, and walk in His ways. So when Zechariah first begins his prophecy, God's message through him is this (i. 3–6)—the people are to return unto

the Lord: they were not to be as their fathers, unto whom the former prophets cried, saying—

"Return ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto Me, saith the Lord."

The disobedient people had passed away; the former prophets too had passed. Only God's words and statutes had not passed. They were abiding; and, like the other prophets in the eighth century, Zechariah, in the sixth century B.C., was to remind his hearers, the returned exiles, of those words and statutes. This we read in the first chapter.

Again, when some of the Jews had sent to Zechariah to ask if it was still their duty to keep the different fasts which had been customary during the exile, in remembrance of the siege and fall of Jerusalem, his answer is just like a word from one of the earlier prophets; the fasts were no good *in themselves;* only were they of value if they helped the people to remember God, and to serve Him better. This was what God had always wished of His people (vii. 1–10)—

"Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart."

It is the old lesson. True religion makes people just and kind and merciful. Outward observances are good if they help us to be good. The more you read of the prophets, the more you will feel that this was what God taught through them.

Zechariah has one beautiful picture of Jerusalem as God hoped to see it (viii. 2–5)—

"Thus saith the Lord: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the Holy Mountain. There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

When any place can be called a City of Truth and of Holiness, then we are sure that God is dwelling there, though unseen. And it is beautiful to think of the old people, living out their days in peace and contentment, and the children at their happy play, with all their lives before them.

We must not forget that it rests with us to make the places where we live such as Zechariah saw the ideal Jerusalem to be.

The teaching of the two prophets so encouraged the people that the temple was built and completed by the year 515 B.C. Then we hear of no prophet for perhaps fifty years, when we come to *Malachi*, the prophet who gives his name to the last book in the Old Testament. We know nothing about him personally, and cannot be quite sure of the exact date when he lived. But from his book we learn something of the state of the Jews about half a century after the rebuilding of the temple. They had been disappointed in their hopes that their Persian masters might be overcome by some stronger power, and that they would become once more an independent nation under their own king. Many of them seem to have lost their faith in God's justice and love. The Temple services were not neglected, but the sacrifices were not offered with real devotion, and the law was not faithfully obeyed.

Malachi begins his prophecy by reminding them of God's love, and of their ingratitude (i. 2, 6; ii. 10)—

"I have loved you, saith the Lord. . . . A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is My honour? and if a master, where is My fear? . . . Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?"

Malachi specially rebukes the priests, the sons of Levi, who ought to have been the true messengers of God, to teach and guide the people. Instead of that, they had wearied of His service, and there had been no pure worship at His altar. Malachi even tells them that the Gentiles, whom the Jews always despised, are more truly God's worshippers than they are (i. 11)—

"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto My name, and a pure offering; for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts."

These words shew us that already many outside the Jewish nation had begun to know and worship the true God. And we should remember this verse of Malachi, because it is an encouragement to look forward to the time when from farthest

east to farthest west God's name shall be great, and pure worship shall be offered to Him.

To those who thought God had forgotten them, or that He was not the just God about whom they had been taught, Malachi promises a solemn Coming of the Lord (iii. 1)—

"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple : . . . but who may abide the day of His coming ? and who shall stand when He appeareth ?"

He will appear as a God of judgment, and He will witness against all wrong-doing, all selfishness and untruth and cruelty towards the poor and weak.

Those who fear God are not forgotten. Their names are written in a "book of remembrance" before the Lord. The solemn Coming will not be terrible to them (iv. 2)—

"Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings ; and ye shall go forth, and gambol as calves of the stall."

Is not this a beautiful picture of a summer sunrise, after the darkness of night, to those

who have perhaps passed the hours in sadness or anxiety? "The full bright burst of summer morn" comes with hope and healing, and we can go forth afresh to our day's work, as the animals troop joyously out of the dark stall into the sunny pastures.

If the Jews were to find the Lord's Coming a glad day, they must remember all the statutes and judgments which God had given them by Moses. Before that day, Malachi tells them, Elijah the prophet will come to prepare the way of the Lord. It was a belief among the Jews that Elijah, the faithful prophet of the true religion, whose end had been unlike that of other men, would one day come back to earth again. And when the true Sun of Righteousness arose, bringing life and healing to men, though Elijah did not return, John the Baptist was sent "to prepare the way of the Lord."

Malachi's prophecy ends here. He is the last of the fourteen prophets, from Amos onwards, whose writings we have been considering. In his picture you will see that he is looking back

MALACHI

at all the prophets who had gone before him. With one hand he points forward to John the Baptist (St. Matt. xi. 14)—

"If ye will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come."

With the other hand Malachi directs attention to his prophetic scroll, on which are written two Hebrew words, meaning "The Law of Moses." The morning star shining above him is a symbol of the Baptist, who will precede the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Malachi is represented as an old man leaning on a staff, because he is nearly the last of the prophets. Indeed, because his book is found at the very end of the Old Testament, people have thought that there have been no prophetic writings since his time. This is a mistake; we have still to read of three more prophets who give their names to books of the Bible.

CHAPTER XI

PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH AND OF THE DAY OF PENTECOST

It adds much interest to our readings from the prophets when we can know something of the personal life of the writer, and of the history of the times when he lived and prophesied. But we must now speak of two prophets about whom we know nothing but their message. These are Joel, and the writer of the last six chapters of the book of Zechariah. We do not know with any certainty when these prophecies were written, but it seems most likely that they belong to a time a good deal later than the rebuilding of the temple, or even than the prophecy of Malachi. This Second Zechariah is of special interest to us, because some of his prophecies of the Messiah are well

known to us from quotations in the gospels. In our Lord's last days several incidents reminded His disciples of words in the book of Zechariah, and each fulfilment of prophecy helped to make more clear to the evangelist that He was indeed the promised Messiah.

The prophet sees in a vision the righteous King coming to Jerusalem, and he sees Him victorious, yet lowly and peaceful—

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass."

We all remember our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, a few days before His Passion. He was the truly victorious King, yet He did not ride on a horse, as a victorious general would have done, but on an ass, which is the animal still used in the East by peaceful rulers who are not soldiers. This Second Zechariah, by his vision of a lowly Messiah, helped to turn men's minds to the right idea of how the Christ would appear when He came among men.

There is rather a difficult allegory in this prophecy, in which the prophet appears as sent by God to be the shepherd of His people Israel (chapter xi.). He "feeds the flock," and has two pastoral staves; one he calls Beauty, or Graciousness, and this seems to signify God's gracious favour towards His people; the other he calls Bands, or Union, signifying the union between the northern and southern tribes. Then the shepherd wearies of the ungrateful people, and breaks his staff Beauty, and asks them if they wish to give him his hire. And the people give him in payment of his services "thirty pieces of silver." This is the sum of money which used to be given to an injured slave. You will remember that Judas received the same sum in return for his betrayal of our Lord, and the evangelist remembered the allegory. The prophet breaks his other staff, shewing that the people are no longer united.

There are other prophecies in this Second Zechariah which were all literally fulfilled during our Lord's Passion. There seems to be a good shepherd raised up again to feed God's flock.

ZECHARIAH

The Lord speaks of Him as "the Man that is My fellow," and this can hardly refer to any but One. The prophecy says (xiii. 7)—

> "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

And again (xii. 10)—

> "They shall look unto Me whom they have pierced."

And again (xiii. 6)—

> "What are these wounds in Thine hands?"

and the answer is—

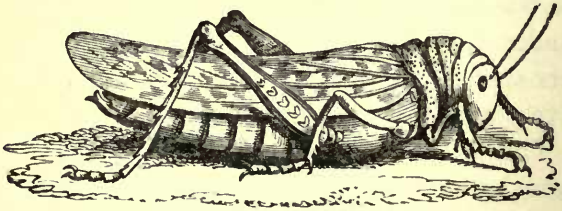
> "Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends."

In the picture you will see the prophet with the two staves, in priestly head-dress and in princely robe, as a type of the Good Shepherd, who was Prophet, Priest, and King. He has cut asunder the staff called Beauty, and holds the other staff in his hand. He is casting forth the thirty pieces of silver.

This prophecy is a difficult one, and there is much that you could not understand in it. But God taught His people through this unnamed prophet what the great prophet of the restoration

had already taught them: the truth that the Good Shepherd when He came would not be an earthly king and conqueror, but would suffer and die for His friends, and show the glory and greatness of suffering when it is endured in the fulfilment of a great purpose, and is the revelation of God's undying love for His people.

The prophet *Joel* tells us nothing of the coming Messiah, but one of his prophecies was wonderfully fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost after our Lord's Ascension. This short book is very interesting to read, and not so difficult to understand as many of the others. It begins with a



very striking description of a great plague of

locusts which had come upon the land. These creatures, when they come in great swarms into a country, do terrible damage to fields and crops. They are a large kind of grasshopper, and the whirring of their wings makes a sound like the rattle of hail or the crackling of bush on fire. Wherever they go they devour every blade of grass and every green thing. You should read the description of this terrible plague in the second chapter of Joel. If you read it aloud, it sounds like the description of a destroying army.

This calamity was not the only one that had fallen upon the land. There had been a great drought also, and this makes the shrubs and grass catch fire in hot countries. So that men and beasts alike had been suffering greatly when Joel utters his prophecy. Like other prophets, he sees in these troubles the judgment of God. But a sterner punishment than these natural calamities will fall upon the people, unless they turn to Him with all their heart. And this Joel bids them do, in words which are very familiar

to us, because they are often read as the opening sentence in our Morning Service—

> "Rend your heart and not your garments,
> And turn unto the Lord your God:
> For He is gracious and merciful,
> Slow to anger, and of great kindness,
> And repenteth Him of the evil."

It is an old message which the prophets are ever repeating, that the turning to God must be of *the heart.* No outward sign of mourning for sin, such as rending their clothes in token of sorrow, is enough. There were to be the outward signs too, the weeping and fasting, but the religion must be inward and spiritual. Then the Lord will shew that "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness." The prophet foresees that after true repentance on the part of the people, the troubles will pass by, and plenty and prosperity will take the place of scarcity and suffering. Besides these earthly blessings, which the prophet knows so truly to be God's own gifts, spiritual blessings are promised—

> "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh;
> And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

Photo.] [*Alinari.*

JOEL.

(*From the Fresco by Michelangelo.*)

Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions :
And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids
will I pour out My Spirit."

This promise Joel understands to refer to the Jewish nation only. But, even so, it is a wonderful picture to have before our minds, of a whole people, old and young, men and women, rich and poor, masters and servants, filled with God's Spirit, and able to utter His messages in their daily life and conversation. When the Spirit was poured out upon the first Christian disciples on the Day of Pentecost, St. Peter knew that the prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled. But he did not yet know that the promise of the Spirit was to all people, not to the Jews only. That lesson he learned later on. We are familiar with the thought that all these promises belong to us, as well as to the people to whom the prophets were first sent. It was the great mission of Israel to be the bearer of true religion to all the world ; and in the fulness of time it was from Palestine that the glad tidings came which told us that we were fellow-heirs with the Jews of God's promises.

The later part of Joel's book speaks of a great Day of the Lord, when the nations should be judged, and only Judah should be saved. The width of God's love, including all the great human family, was not revealed to Joel. But the prophet has an unshaken faith that all things come from God's hand, troubles as well as prosperity ; that He will bless those who turn to Him with heart-felt repentance, both with earthly and with spiritual blessings ; that He will cleanse them from all their sins, and that He is a refuge and stronghold to His people. And these are lessons which we all may learn from the Book of Joel.

CHAPTER XII

JONAH THE MISSIONARY

We must now consider a book among the prophets which is different from any of the earlier books, in this, that it is a story about a prophet, and not written by the prophet himself. It is as truly inspired by God as any other prophetic writing, but it may be an allegory or parable rather than a story of what actually happened. You know how very common it is in eastern countries for teachers to use stories or parables to convey the lessons they want their disciples to learn. Our Lord Himself continually taught by allegories and parables. In our readings from the prophets we have again and again found that the messages were sent to them in some outward form; they are bidden to do some symbolic act, or they are

taught some truth by a vision, which they describe as if they had actually seen it with their bodily eyes. The writer of the Book of Jonah describes the prophet as having passed through various experiences, which God had prepared for him, and by these experiences having been taught by God great spiritual truths. Whether the events actually happened or not does not affect the truth and deep meaning of the story. It would be well to go through the story first, and then to consider the meaning of the allegory.

Jonah, the son of Amittai, had prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam II., the prosperous and successful king of Northern Israel, of whom we heard in the Book of Amos. Jonah had predicted that the king would largely extend the borders of his kingdom, which, as you know, came to pass. This is all we know of the facts of his life. But our present book, which bears his name, and of which he is the hero, was probably written some centuries later, indeed, after all the other books which we have been considering.

The story begins with a command from God to Jonah to go to Nineveh (the capital city of the Assyrians) and to cry against it, on account of the wickedness of the inhabitants. Jonah refuses to obey the command. He flees in quite an opposite direction. Instead of going east to Nineveh, he goes west to Joppa, a port on the seashore, to take ship to Tarshish in Spain, hoping thus to get away from the presence of the Lord. Why is he unwilling to take God's message to the heathen city? It seems from what he says later in the story that, knowing how gracious and forgiving the Lord was, he feared that the Ninevites would repent, and that God would forgive them, and that they would not be destroyed. Jonah thought that the Jews only were loved by God, and he was jealous when he thought of the heathen nation receiving grace and mercy from Him. After the prophet has embarked, the Lord sends a great storm, "so that the ship was like to be broken." The sailors think that this storm must be on account of some one on board, and they cast lots, and the lot falls upon the Hebrew passenger.

Jonah quite believes that this misfortune has come upon them for his sake, and asks the sailors to throw him into the sea, and thus to save themselves. This they are unwilling to do, and row hard to get back to the land. But the storm grows worse and worse. So they throw Jonah into the sea, "and the sea ceased from her raging."

You must read the whole story for yourselves. Jonah began to learn his lesson from the generosity of the sailors who, though they were heathens, yet were anxious to save the life of this Hebrew prophet, though they knew that he had sinned, and disobeyed the command of his God. Jonah was not drowned. He had more to learn yet. God "prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." And after three days and three nights the fish cast Jonah out upon the dry land.

Then the Lord commanded Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh and preach to the city. This time the prophet obeyed, having learnt how impossible it is to escape from God's commands. Nineveh was a splendid city, with fine buildings

and gardens, and artificial water, with walls so broad that two chariots could roll abreast on them. And beyond the walls there stretched miles and miles of suburbs, all filled with people. It took three days' journey on foot to go right through the city. Jonah walked for a day, and cried,

> "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

And then the story says that the people repented at God's message of judgment, and the king gave command that every one in the city, and even the cattle, should fast, and be clothed in sackcloth to shew their repentance. And God heard their prayers and cries, and forgave them.

And this "displeased Jonah exceedingly." He felt that what he had feared had come to pass. These heathen were to be forgiven and spared, and treated just like God's own people. He was jealous and angry, and saw no advantage in being a Jew, if the heathen Assyrians were to be treated in just the same way. Then the Lord taught him by another miracle. As He had prepared the great

fish to save him from the sea, so He now "prepared a gourd," which shaded Jonah from the blazing sun. The prophet made himself a booth of poles and leaves. This gourd is a wild vine, with broad leaves, which grows very rapidly. Jonah enjoyed the refreshment of the gourd, but God "prepared a worm, and it smote the gourd, that it withered." And then the prophet was exposed to the heat of the sun, and a sultry east wind, and in his suffering he longed to die.

"And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle"?

And there the story ends. But we believe that Jonah had learnt his lesson. By the acted parable of the gourd, God taught him His own width of mercy and loving kindness. Jonah had done nothing for the gourd; he had not planted it, or made it to grow. God had done everything

for the great multitudes of heathen Nineveh, for the one hundred and twenty thousand young children and for the innocent cattle. And was He to let them all go to destruction because they had not had all the privileges of the Chosen People. His tender care and love is over all that He has made.

Now let us consider what is the truth of which this story is the outward form. It seems to be this. Israel, like Jonah, had disobeyed God's commands, and had thought they could live apart from Him. So God prepared a great trial for them, and they were carried away captive by heathen conquerors. Often in the Bible are the "billows and the waves" of the sea used as an image of troubles and calamities. And in one of the prophets (Jer. li. 34) we find Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, described as "swallowing up" Israel, and then "casting her out" again, as the "great fish" cast Jonah out upon the dry land. When the Israelites were delivered from captivity, they had not yet learned the lesson which some of the prophets had taught them, that all nations were

made by God, and that it was His purpose to redeem them all. They were inclined to be angry, like Jonah, that judgment did not fall upon the heathen. And the writer of this beautiful story was inspired by God to make known to his countrymen that the righteous and merciful God loves and receives all the people whom He has created. He made all for Himself, and in time the Jews were to learn, when Christ came, that in Him there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but that all nations are *one*.

This is a beautiful meaning for the story of Jonah. Perhaps we may feel we do not need to be taught this lesson ourselves; but it is well to be often reminded of God's wide love and compassion for all His creatures. And if we have greater advantages and blessings than other nations, or other people of our own nation, this does not mean that God loves us more than them, but that He expects more from us of goodness and service.

CHAPTER XIII

DANIEL THE RIGHTEOUS

One more book is included in the sixteen prophetical books of the Bible, and to some of you parts of that book are very well known. You may have wondered why we have not sooner considered the prophet Daniel, about whom so much is told us. But this book, like the Book of Jonah, was not written by the prophet whose name it bears. It was written very much later than any other of the prophecies we have been considering,—about one hundred and sixty years before Christ.

This was a time of terrible suffering to the Jews. They had never been freed from heathen conquerors. After the Persian dominion had ended they had been subjects of the Macedonian empire,

and then of the Ptolemies of Egypt. Under these last rulers they led a peaceful life. But in 175 B.C. their country passed under the dominion of Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek monarch, and then began a time of persecution and suffering such as the Jews had never before endured. Antiochus wanted all his subjects, including the Jews, to follow Greek customs in everything. He tried to force them to abandon all their sacred rites and ceremonies, and to do all kinds of things which were forbidden by their Law. They were very brave and faithful, and endured the most dreadful sufferings sooner than abandon their faith and religion. Then the deliverance came, through the family of the Maccabees, a priest called Mattathias and his five sons, who loved their country and their God so much that they rose up and led a rebellion against their persecutors, and finally set Judæa free. And it was just at this time, and to encourage the martyrs and the patriots, that the Book of Daniel was written.

The stories in the first six chapters are full of encouragement and teaching. They set before us

Daniel and his three companions, who are said to be exiles in Babylon, first under Nebuchadnezzar, then under a king called Belshazzar, and finally under a Median king called Darius. These stories, like the story of Jonah, may not be literally true. That makes no difference to the value of them. They show us how God helps and sustains His faithful followers in danger and temptation—how faith in God can keep us brave and self-controlled, and obedient to His commands, whatever we may have to suffer. You should read through these chapters again, which tell of the four captives refusing all the tempting food that was offered them, because they knew it was wrong to take it; of Daniel going on regularly with his prayers, in spite of the terrible punishment of being thrown alive to the lions to be torn in pieces by them; of the three men who would not dishonour God by bowing down before an idol image, and would rather die an agonizing death by fire than do what was wrong. All these fill our minds with noble thoughts and purposes. We feel what true religion can do for

us, and we learn, too, that what the prophets from Amos onwards had been teaching the people had not all been lost. The countrymen of the author of the Book of Daniel were enduring the same fiery trials that he describes for God and their faith, and God sustained and delivered them, as He delivered Daniel and his companions.

The second part of the Book of Daniel tells us of visions concerning the future, which also strengthen those for whom they were written. The unknown writer is a true prophet in this, that he has perfect faith in God's ordering of all human affairs. He sees that all nations are subject to Him, and looks forward confidently to the time when His faithful people will be delivered from their heathen aggressors, and able to serve Him in freedom. In the picture we see Daniel looking up and seeing in a vision an angel holding a globe, surmounted by a cross, in his hand. This is symbolic of the truth that in the future the kingdom shall be the Lord's. At the feet of the prophet we can see some terrible beasts, and these are thought to be the heathen nations

DANIEL

whom Daniel in his vision saw overcome by God's power.

In the ninth chapter we read a most beautiful prayer of Daniel's, in which he recalls the past history of the nation down to the time of the captivity. Daniel recognized that the people had sinned against God, and had thus brought their troubles upon themselves.

"Neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants the prophets, which spake in Thy Name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land."

And then he goes on, in words which are familiar to us from our Morning Service—

"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him : neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us, by His servants the prophets."

You should carefully read the whole prayer. It is full of true repentance and trust in God's righteousness and mercy. Daniel reminds God, as it were, of His own character, and of all that He had shown Himself to be. The prayer is an

example of true communion with God, and ends with the words—

"O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not; for Thine own sake, O My God, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy Name."

We will not consider the Visions in detail, as they are not easy to understand, only you should take note of one or two verses which are of special importance in this last book of our prophets. In the twelfth chapter, the angel who is revealing the future to Daniel speaks very clearly of the resurrection from the dead, and adds—

"They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

These are beautiful words with which to end our readings from the prophets. "They that be wise" may be translated "the teachers," and both descriptions apply to "the goodly fellowship of the Prophets." To these wise teachers, "who in the times past spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," indeed belongs the everlasting glory

of having turned many to righteousness. Look back upon the roll of their names. Amos, the blunt countryman; Hosea, the loving husband; Micah, the courageous; Isaiah, the statesman; Nahum, with his song of triumph; Zephaniah and his solemn dirge; Habukkuk on his watchtower; Jeremiah, the steadfast; Obadiah, the indignant; Ezekiel, the exile; the unnamed prophet of Israel's Mission; Haggai and Zechariah, the Temple builders; Malachi, the messenger; Joel, the prophet of Pentecost; the author of the Book of Jonah; and Daniel, the brave and faithful. They lived at different times in their nation's history, their characters and circumstances were different, their message came to them in different ways; but they were all alike in this, that they revealed to men what God is, and what His Will for men is. God is Righteous, God is Holy, God is Loving. We learn this from the work of the prophets, and we learn further that His Will for us is that we too should be good, holy, and loving. Parts of these books are difficult to understand, but much seems to be written so clearly that "he may run

that readeth it." May we be among the number of those who "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the precious teaching of the "holy Prophets, which have been since the world began."

THE END

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